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THE CREATORS



"To the book!" she said. "To Nina Lempriere's book! You
can drink now, George"

THE CREATORS

A COMEDY

BY

MAY SINCLAIR

AUTHOR OF

"THE DIVINE FIRE," "THE HELPMATE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY ARTHUR I. KELLER



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THE CREATORS

THE CREATORS

THREE times during dinner he had asked himself what, after all, was he there for? And at the end of it, as she rose, her eyes held him for the first time that evening, as if they said that he would see.

She had put him as far from her as possible, at the foot of her table between two of the four preposterous celebrities whom she had asked him, George Tanqueray, to meet.

Everything, except her eyes, had changed since he had last dined with Jane Holland, in the days when she was, if anything, more obscure than he. It was no longer she who presided at the feast, but her portrait by Gisborne, R.A. He had given most of his attention to the portrait.

Gisborne, R.A., was a solemn egoist, and his picture represented, not Jane Holland, but Gisborne's limited idea of her. It was a sombre face, broadened and foreshortened by the heavy, leaning brows. A face with a straight-drawn mouth and eyes prophetic of tragedy, a face in which her genius brooded, down-cast, flameless, and dumb. He had got all her features, her long black eyebrows, her large, deep-set eyes, flattened queerly by the level eyebrows, her nose, a trifle too long in the bridge, too wide in the nostril, and her mouth which could look straight enough when her will was dominant. He had got her hair, the darkness and the mass of it. Tanqueray, in his abominable way, had said that Gisborne had put his best work into that, and when Gisborne resented it he had told him that it was immortality enough for any one to have painted Jane Holland's hair. (This was in the days when Gisborne was celebrated and Tanqueray was not.)

If Jane had had the face that Gisborne gave her she would never have had any charm for Tanqueray. For what Gisborne had tried to get was that oppressive effect of genius, heavily looming. Not a hint had he caught of her high levity, of her look when the bright devil of comedy possessed her, not a flash of her fiery quality, of her eyes' sudden gold, and the ways of her delicate, her brilliant mouth, its fine, deliberate sweep, its darting tilt, like wings lifted for flight.

When Tanqueray wanted to annoy Jane he told her that she looked like her portrait by Gisborne, R.A.

They were all going to the play together. But at the last moment, she, to Tanqueray's amazement, threw them over. She was too tired, she said, to go.

The celebrities pressed round her, voluble in commiseration. Of course, if she was n't going, they would n't go. They did n't want to. They would sacrifice a thousand plays, but not an evening with Jane Holland. They bowed before her in all the postures and ceremonies of their adoration. And Jane Holland looked at them curiously with her tired eyes; and Tanqueray looked at her. He wondered how on earth she was going to get rid of them.

She did it with a dexterity he would hardly have given her credit for. Her tired eyes helped her.

Then, as the door was closing on them, she turned to him.

"Are you going with them," she said, "or will you stay with me?"

"I am certainly not going with them ——" He paused, hesitating.

"Then — you 'll stay?" For the first time in their intercourse she hesitated too.

"But you 're tired?" he said.

"Not now."

She smiled appealingly, but not like a woman sure of the success of her appeal.

That lapse of certainty marked a difference in their relations. He chose to put it down to the strange circumstance of her celebrity; and, though he hesitated, he stayed. To stay was,

after all, the thing which at the moment he most wanted to do. And the thing which Tanqueray most wanted to do at the moment that he invariably did. This temper of his had but one drawback, that it left him at the moment's mercy.

That was what he felt now when he found himself alone with her for the first time in many weeks.

She wondered how far he had seen through her. She had made the others go that he might stay with her, a palpable manœuvre. Of course she would not have lent herself to it for any ordinary man. His genius justified her.

Six weeks ago she would not have had to retreat behind his genius. Six weeks ago she had never thought of his genius as a thing apart from him. There was her own genius, if it came to that. It had its rights. Six weeks ago she would not have had to apologize to herself for keeping him.

"I didn't know you could change your mind so quickly," he said.

"If you had my mind, George, you'd want to change it."

"What's wrong with your mind, Jinny?"

"It won't work."

"Ah, it's come to that, has it? I knew it would."

She led the way into another room, the room she wrote in. Jane lived alone. Sometimes he had wondered how she liked it.

There was defiance in her choice of that top floor in the old house in Kensington Square. To make sure her splendid isolation, she had cut herself off by a boarded, a barricaded staircase, closed with a door at the foot. Tanqueray knew well that consecrated, book-lined room, and the place of everything it held. He had his own place there, the place of honour and affection. His portrait (a mere photograph) was on her writing-table. His "Works"—five novels—were on a shelf by themselves at the head of her chair, where she could lay her hands on them.

For they had found each other before the world had found her. That was the charm which had drawn them together, which, more than any of her charms, had held him until now. She had preserved the incomparable innocence of a great artist;

she was free, with the freedom of a great nature, from what Tanqueray, who loathed it, called the "literary taint." They both avoided the circles where it spread deepest, in their nervous terror of the social process, of "getting to know the right people." They confessed that, in the beginning, they had fought shy even of each other, lest one of them should develop a hideous susceptibility and impart the taint. There were points at which they both might have touched the aristocracy of journalism; but they had had no dealings with its proletariat or its demi-monde. Below these infernal circles they had discerned the fringe of the bottomless pit, popularity, which he, the Master, told her was "*the* unclean thing." So that in nineteen hundred and two George Tanqueray, as a novelist, stood almost undiscovered on his tremendous height.

But it looked as if Jane Holland were about to break her charm.

"I hope," he said, "it has n't spoilt you, Jinny?"

"What has n't?"

"Your pop — your celebrity."

"Don't talk about it. It's bad enough when they ——"

"*They* need n't. I must. Celebrity — you observe that I call it by no harsher name — celebrity is the beginning of the end. I don't want you to end that way."

"I shan't. It's not as if I were intrigued by it. You don't know how I hate it sometimes."

"You hate it, yet you're drawn."

"By what? By vanity?"

"Not by your vanity, though there *is* that."

"By what, then?"

"Oh, Jinny, you're a woman."

"May n't I be?"

"No," he said brutally, "you may n't."

For a moment her eyes pleaded: "May n't I be a woman?" But she was silent, and he answered her silence rather than her eyes.

"Because you've genius."

"Do you, you of all people, tie me down to that?"

He laughed. "Why not I?"

"Because it was you who told me not to keep back. You told me not to live alone. Don't you remember?"

He remembered. It was in the days when he first knew her.

"I did. Because you ran to the other extreme then. You were terrified of life."

"Because I was a woman. You told me to be a woman!"

"Because I was the only man you knew. How you remember things."

"That comes of living alone. I've never really forgotten anything you ever said to me. It's where I score."

"You had nobody but me to talk to then, if you remember."

"No. Nobody but you."

"And it was n't enough for you."

"Oh, was n't it? When you were never the same person for a week together. It was like knowing fifteen or twenty men."

He smiled. "I've always been the same man to you, Jinny. Have n't I?"

"I'm not so sure," said she.

"Anyhow, you were safe with me."

"From what?"

"From being 'had.' But now you've begun knowing all sorts of people——"

"Is that why you've kept away from me?"

He ignored her question. "Awful people, implacable, insatiable, pernicious, destructive people. The trackers down, the hangers-on, the persecutors, the pursuers. Did I ever pursue you?"

"No, George. I can't say you ever did. I can't see you pursuing any one."

"*They* will. And they'll have you at every turn."

"No. I'm safe. You see, I don't care for any of them."

"They'll 'have' you all the same. You lend yourself to being 'had.'"

"Do I?" She said it defiantly.

"No. You never lend — you give yourself. To be eaten up. You let everybody prey on you. You'd be preyed on by me, if I let you."

"Oh — you ——"

"And yet," he said, "I wonder ——"

He paused, considering her with brilliant but unhappy eyes.

"Jinny," he said, "where do you get the fire that you put into your books?"

"Where you get yours," she said.

Again he considered her. "Come out of it," he said. "Get away from these dreadful people, these dreadful, clever little people."

She smiled, recognizing them.

"Look at *me*," he said.

"Oh, you," she said again, with another intonation.

"Yes, me. I was born out of it."

"And I — was n't I born? Look at *me*?" She turned to him, holding her head high.

"I am looking at you. I've been looking at you all the evening — and I see a difference already."

"What you see is the difference in my clothes. There is no difference in me."

It was he who was different. She looked at him, trying to penetrate the secret of his difference. There was a restlessness about him, a fever and the brilliance fever brought.

She looked at him and saw a creature dark and colourless, yet splendidly alive. She knew him by heart, every detail of him, the hair, close-cropped, that left clean the full backward curve of his head; his face with its patches of ash and bistre; his eyes, hazel, lucid, intent, sunk under irritable brows; his mouth, narrowish, the lower lip full, pushed forward with the slight prominence of its jaw, the upper lip accentuated by the tilt of its moustache. Tanqueray's face, his features, always seemed to her to lean forward as against a wind, suggesting things eager and in salient flight. They shared now in his difference, his excitement. His eyes as they looked at her had lost something of their

old lucidity. They were more brilliant and yet somehow more obscure.

Then, suddenly, she saw how he was driven.

He was out on the first mad hunt with love. Love and he stalked the hills, questing the visionary maid.

It was not she. His trouble was as yet vague and purely impersonal. She saw (it was her business) by every infallible sign and token that it was not she. She saw, too, that he was enraged with her for this reason, that it was not she. That showed that he was approaching headlong the point of danger; and she, if she were his friend, was bound to keep him back. He was not in love with her or with any one, but he was in that insane mood when honourable men marry, sometimes disastrously. Any woman, even she, could draw him to her now by holding out her hand.

And between them there came a terror, creeping like a beast of prey, dumb, and holding them dumb. She searched for words to dispel it, but no words came; her heart beat too quickly; he must hear it beat. That was not the signal he was waiting for, that beating of her heart.

He tried to give himself the semblance and the sense of ease by walking about the room and examining the things in it. There were some that it had lacked before, signs that the young novelist had increased in material prosperity. Yes. He had liked her better when she had worked harder and was as poor as he. They had come to look on poverty as their protection from the ruinous world. He now realized that it had also been their protection from each other. He was too poor to marry.

He reflected with some bitterness that Jane was not, now.

She in her corner called him from his wanderings. She had made the coffee. He drank it where he stood, on the hearthrug, ignoring his old place on the sofa by her side.

She brooded there, leaving her cup untasted. She had manoeuvred to keep him. And now she wished that she had let him go.

"Are n't you going to drink your coffee?" he said.

"No. I shan't sleep if I do."

"Have n't you been sleeping?"

"Not very well."

"That's why you're looking like your portrait. That man is n't such a silly ass as I thought he was."

"I wish," she said, "you'd contrive to forget him, and it, and everything."

"Everything?"

"You know what I mean. The horrid thing that's happened to me. My — my celebrity." She brought it out with a little shiver of revolt.

He laughed. "But when you remind me of it every minute? When it's everlastingly, if I may say so, on the carpet?"

Her eyes followed his. It was evident that she had bought a new one.

"It does n't mean what you think it does. It is n't, it really is n't as bad as that ——"

"I was afraid."

"You need n't be. I'm still living from hand to mouth, only rather larger mouthfuls."

"Why apologize?"

"I can't help it. You make me feel like some horrid literary parvenu."

"I make you feel ——?"

"Yes. You — you. You don't think me a parvenu, do you?" she pleaded.

"You know what I think you."

"I don't. I only know what you used to think me."

"I think the same."

"Tell me — tell me."

"I think, if you can hold yourself together for the next five years, you'll write a superb book, Jinny. But it all depends on what you do with yourself in the next five years."

He paused.

"At the present moment there's hardly any one — of our generation, mind you — who counts except you and I."

He paused again.

"If you and I have done anything decent it's because, first of all, our families have cast us off."

"Mine has n't yet."

"It's only a question of time if you go on," said Tanqueray.

He had never seen Jane's family. He knew vaguely that her father was the rector of a small parish in Dorset, and that he had had two wives in such rapid succession that their effect from a distance, so Tanqueray said, was scandalously simultaneous. The rector, indeed, had married his first wife for the sake of a child, and his second for the child's sake. He had thus achieved a younger family so numerous that it had kept him from providing properly for Jane. It was what Tanqueray called the "consecrated immorality" of Jane's father that had set Jane free.

Tanqueray's father was a retired colonel. A man of action, of rash and inconsiderate action, he regarded Tanqueray with a disapproval so warm and generous that it left the young man freer, if anything, than Jane.

"Anyhow," he went on, "we have n't let ourselves be drawn in. And yet that's our temptation, yours and mine."

Again he paused.

"If we were painters or musicians we should be safer. Their art draws them by one divine sense. Ours drags us by the heart and brain, by the very soul, into the thick of it. *The* unpardonable sin is separating literature from life. You know that as well as I do."

She did. She worked divinely, shaping unashamed the bodies and the souls of men. There was nothing in contemporary literature to compare with the serene, inspired audacity of Jane Holland. Her genius seemed to have kept the transcendent innocence of the days before creation.

Tanqueray continued in his theme. Talking like this allayed his excitement.

"We're bound," he said, "to get mixed up with people. They're the stuff we work in. It's almost impossible to keep sinless and detached. We're being tempted all the time. People — people — people — we can't have enough of 'em; we can't

keep off 'em. The thing is — to keep 'em off us. And Jane, I *know* — they 're getting at you."

She did not deny it. They were.

"And you have n't the — the nerve to stand up against it."

"I have stood up against it."

"You have. So have I. When we were both poor."

"You want me to be poor?"

"I don't want you to be a howling pauper like me, but, well, just pleasantly short of cash. There's nothing like that for keeping you out of it."

"You want me to be thoroughly uncomfortable? Deprived of everything that makes life amusing?"

"Thoroughly uncomfortable. Deprived of everything that stands in the way of your genius."

She felt a sudden pang of jealousy, a hatred of her genius, this thing that had been tacked on to her. He cared for it and could be tender to it, but not to her.

"You're a cruel beast," she said, smiling through her pain.

"My cruelty and my beastliness are nothing to the beastliness and the cruelty of art. The Lord our God is a consuming fire. You must be prepared to be burnt."

"It's all very well for you, George. I don't like being burnt."

That roused him; it stirred the devil in him.

"Do you suppose *I* like it? Why, you — you don't know what burning is. It means standing by, on fire with thirst, and seeing other people drink themselves drunk."

"You don't want to be drunk, George. Any more than I do."

"I do not, thank God. But it would be all the same if I did. I can't get a single thing I do want."

"Can't you? I should have thought you could have got most things you really wanted."

"I could if I were a grocer or a draper. Why, a hair-dresser has more mastery of the means of life."

He was telling her, she knew, that he was too poor for the quest of the matchless lady; and through all his young and sombre rage of frustration there flashed forth his anger with her as the unfit.

He began to tramp up and down the room again, by way of distraction from his mood. Now and then his eyes turned to her with no thought in them, only that dark, unhappy fire.

He was quiet now. He had caught sight of some sheets of manuscript lying on her desk.

"What's this?" he said.

"Only the last thing I've written."

"May I look?"

"You may."

He took it up and sat beside her, close beside her, and turned the leaves over with a nervous hand. He was not reading. There was no thought in his eyes.

He looked at her again. She saw that he was at the mercy of his moment, and of hers.

For it was her moment. There was a power that every woman had, if she cared to use it and knew how. There was a charm that had nothing to do with beauty, for it was present in the unbeautiful. These things had their life secret and apart from every other charm and every other power. His senses called to the unknown and unacknowledged sense in her. She knew that he could be hers if she answered to that call. She had only to kindle her flame, send out her signal.

And she said to herself, "I can't. I can't take him like this. He is n't himself. It would be hateful of me."

In that moment she had no fear. Love held her back and burning honour that hardly knew itself from shame. It accused her of having manœuvred for that moment. It said, "You can't let him come in like this and trap him."

Another voice in her whispered, "You fool. If you don't marry him some other woman will — in this mood of his." And honour cried, answering it, "Let her. So long as it is n't I."

She had a torturing sense of his presence. And with it her fear came back to her, and she rose suddenly to her feet, and stood apart from him.

He flung the manuscript into the place she had left, and bowed forward, hiding his face in his hands. He rose too, and she knew that his moment had gone. She had let it go.

Then, with a foreboding of his departure, she tried to call him back to her, not in his way, but her own, the way of the heart.

"Do you know what I should like to do?" she said. "I should like to sweep it all away, and to get back to that little room, and for nobody to come near me but you, nobody to read me but you, nobody to talk about me but you. Do you remember?"

He did, but he was not going to talk about it. In the fierceness of his mortal moment he was impatient of everything that for her held immorality.

"We were so happy then," she said. "Why can't we be happy now?"

"I've told you why."

"Yes, and I can't bear it. When I think of you ——"

He looked at her with the lucid gaze of the psychologist, of the physician who knew her malady.

"Don't think of me," he said. His eyes seemed to say, "That would be worst of all."

And so he left her.

II

HE really did not want her to think of him, any more than he wanted to think intensely and continuously of her. What he had admired in her so much was her deep loyalty to their compact, the way she had let him alone and insisted on his letting her alone.

This desire of Tanqueray's for detachment was not so much an attitude as an instinct. His genius actually throve on his seclusion, and absorption in life would have destroyed its finest qualities. It had no need of sustained and frequent intercourse with men and women. For it worked with an incredible rapidity. It took at a touch and with a glance of the eye the thing it wanted. It was an eye that unstripped, a hand that plunged under all coverings to the essential nakedness.

His device was, "Look and let go." He had never allowed himself to hold on or be held on to; for thus you were dragged down and swamped; you were stifled by the stuff you worked in. Your senses, he maintained, were no good if you could n't see a thing at the first glance and feel it with the first touch. Vision and contact prolonged removed you so many degrees from the reality; and what you saw that way was not a bit of use to you. He denied perversely that genius was two-sexed, or that it was even essentially a virile thing. The fruitful genius was feminine, rather, humble and passive in its attitude to life. It yearned perpetually for the embrace, the momentary embrace of the real. But no more. All that it wanted, all that it could deal with was the germ, the undeveloped thing; the growing and shaping and bringing forth must be its own. The live thing, the thing that kicked, was never produced in any other way. Genius in a great realist was itself flesh and blood. It was only the little men that were the plagiarists of life; only

the sterile imaginations that adopted the already born, and bargained with experience to do their work for them.

And yet there was no more assiduous devotee of experience than George Tanqueray. He repudiated with furious contempt any charge of inspiration. There was no such thing as inspiration. There was instinct, and there was eyesight. The rest was all infernal torment and labour in the sweat of your brow. All this Tanqueray believed sincerely.

It would have been hard to find a creature so subtle and at the same time so unsophisticated as he.

For five years his genius, his temperament and his poverty had combined to keep him in a half-savage virgin solitude. Men had penetrated it, among them one or two distinguished in his own profession. But as for their women, the wives and daughters of the distinguished, he had shrunk perceptibly from their advances. He condemned their manner as a shade too patronizing to his proud obscurity. And now, at two-and-thirty, of three women whom he really knew, he only really cared for one, Jane Holland.

He had further escaped the social round by shifting his abode incessantly, flying from the town to the country, and from the country back to the town, driven from each haunt, he declared, by people, persistent, insufferable people.

For the last week he had been what he called settled at Hampstead. The charm of Hampstead was that nobody whom he knew lived there.

He had chosen the house because it stood at a corner, in a road too steep for traffic. He had chosen his rooms because they looked on to a green slope with a row of willows at the bottom and a row of willows at the top, and because, beyond the willows, he could see the line of a low hill, pure and sharp against the sky. At sunset the grass of his slope turned to a more piercing green and its patches of brown earth to purple. He looked at the sublime procession of his willows and reminded himself with ecstasy that there was not a soul in Hampstead whom he knew. And that suburb appeared to him an enchanted place where at

last he had found peace. He would stay there for ever, in those two rooms.

Here, on the morning after he had dined with Jane Holland, he sat down to write. And he wrote, but with a fury that destroyed more than it created. In those days Tanqueray could never count upon his genius. The thing would stay with him peaceably for months at a time; but it never let him know the precise moment of its arrival or departure. At times it seemed the one certainty in an otherwise dubious world, at other times it was a creature of unmistakably feminine caprice. He courted it, and it avoided him. He let it go, and it came back to him, caressing and tormenting him, compelling his embrace. There were days when it pursued and captured him, and then it had wings that swept him divinely to its end. There were days when he had to go out and find it, and lure the winged thing back to him. Once caught, it was unswerving in its operations.

But Tanqueray had no lower power he could fall back upon when his genius failed him. And apparently it had failed him now. In forty-eight hours he had accomplished nothing.

At the end of the forty-ninth hour wasted, he drew his pen through what he had written and sank into a depth as yet unknown to him. His genius had before now appeared to him as an insane hallucination. But still he had cared for it supremely. Now, the horrible thing was that he did not care. His genius was of all things that which interested him least. He was possessed by one trouble and by one want, the more devastating because it was aimless and obscure.

That came of dining with Jane Holland.

He was not in love with Jane. On the contrary, he was very angry with her for wanting him to be in love with her when he could not be. And he was angry with himself for wanting to be in love with her when he could not be, when his heart (by which the psychologist meant his senses) was not in it.

But wherever his heart was, his thoughts, when he let them go, were always running upon Jane. They ran on her now.

He conceived of her more than ever as the unfit. "She's too damnably clever," he kept saying to himself, "too damnably clever." And he took up her last book just to see again how damnably clever she was.

In an instant he was at her feet. She was n't clever when she wrote that. What a genius she had, what a burning, flashing, laughing genius. It matched his own; it rose to it, giving him flame for flame. Almost as clear-eyed it was, and tenderer hearted. Reading Jane Holland, Tanqueray became depressed or exalted according to his mood. He was now depressed.

But he could not leave her. In spirit he remained at her feet. He bowed himself in the dust. "I could n't have done it," he said, "to save my life. I shall never do anything like that."

He wrote and told her so. But he did not go to see her, as he would have done six weeks ago.

And then he began wondering how she conceived these things if she did not feel them. "I don't believe," he said, "that she does n't feel. She's like me." Too like him to be altogether fit.

So he found confusion in his judgment and mystery in his vision of her, while his heart made and unmade her image ten times a day.

He went out and tramped the lanes and fields for miles beyond Hampstead. He lay stretched out there on his green slopes, trying not to think about Jane. For all this exercise fatigued him, and made it impossible for him to think of anything else. And when he got back into his room its solitude was intolerable. For ten days he had not spoken to any woman but his landlady. Every morning, before he sat down to write, he had to struggle with his terror of Mrs. Eldred. It was growing on him like a nervous malady.

An ordinary man would have said of Mrs. Eldred that she was rather a large woman. To Tanqueray, in his malady, she appeared immense. The appeal of her immensity was not merely to the eye. It fascinated and demoralized the imagination. Tanqueray's imagination was sane when it was at work, handling the stuff of life; it saw all things unexaggerated, unabridged. But the power went wild when he turned it out to play. It

played with Mrs. Eldred's proportions till it became tormented with visions of shapeless and ungovernable size. He saw her figure looming in the doorway, brooding over his table and his bed, rolling through space to inconceivable confines which it burst. For though this mass moved slowly, it was never still. When it stood it quivered. Worse than anything, when it spoke it wheezed.

He had gathered from Mrs. Eldred that her conversation (if you could call it conversation) was the foredoomed beginning of his day. He braced himself to it every morning, but at last his nerves gave way, and he forgot himself so far as to implore her for God's sake not to talk to him.

The large woman replied placably that if he would leave everything to her, it would not be necessary for her to talk.

He left everything. At the end of the week his peace was charged to him at a figure which surprised him by its moderation.

Still he was haunted by one abominable fear, the fear of being ill, frightfully ill, and dying in some vast portion of her arms. Under the obsession of this thought he passed whole hours sitting at his desk, bowed forward, with his face hidden in his hands.

He was roused from it one evening by a sound that came from the other end of the room, somewhere near the sideboard. It startled him, because, being unaccompanied by any wheezing, it could not have proceeded from Mrs. Eldred. It was, indeed, one of those small voices that come from things diminutive and young. It seemed to be trying to tell him that dinner was ready. He looked round over his shoulder to see what kind of creature it was that could thus introduce itself without his knowledge.

It was young, young almost to excess. He judged it to be about two- or three-and-twenty. At his approach it drew as close as possible to the sideboard. It had the air of cultivating assiduously the art of self-effacement, for its face, when looked at, achieved an expression of inimitable remoteness.

He now perceived that the creature was not only young but most adorably feminine. He smiled, simply to reassure it.

"How on earth did you get in without my hearing you?"

"I was told to be very quiet, sir. And not to speak."

"Well, you have spoken, have n't you?"

She, as it were, seized upon and recovered the smile that darted out to play reprehensibly about the corners of her mouth.

"I had to," said she.

Soft-footed and soft-tongued, moving like a breath, that was how Rose Eldred first appeared to George Tanqueray.

He had asked her name, and her name, she said, was Rose.

If you reasoned about Rose, you saw that she had no right to be pretty, yet she was. Nature had defied reason when she made her, working from some obscure instinct for roundness; an instinct which would have achieved perfection in the moulding of Rose's body if Rose had only grown two inches taller. Not that the purest reason could think of Rose as dumpy. Her figure, defying nature, passed for perfect. It was her face that baffled you. It had a round chin that was a shade too large for it; an absurd little nose with a round end, tilted; grey eyes a thought too round, and eyebrows too thick by a hair's-breadth. Not a feature that did not err by a thought, a hair's-breadth or a shade. All but her mouth, and that was perfect. A small mouth, with lips so soft, so full, that you could have called it round. It had pathetic corners, and when she spoke it trembled for very softness. From her mouth upwards it was as if Rose's face had been first delicately painted, and then as delicately blurred. Only her chin was left clean and decided.

And as Nature, in making Rose's body, had erred by excess of roundness, when it came to Rose's hair, she rioted in an iniquitous, an unjust largesse of vitality. Rose herself seemed aware of the sin of it, she tried so hard to restrain it, coiling it tight at the back, and smoothing it sleek as a bird's wing above her brows. Mouse-colored hair it was on the top, and shining gold at the temples and at the roots that curled away under the coil.

She wore a brown skirt, and a green bodice with a linen collar, and a knot of brown ribbon at her throat.

Thus attired, for three days Rose waited on him. For three

days she never spoke a word except to tell him that a meal was ready.

In three days he noticed a remarkable increase in his material comfort. There was about Rose a shining cleanliness that imparted itself to everything she laid her hands on. (Her hands were light in their touch and exquisitely gentle.) His writing-table was like a shrine that she tended. Every polished surface of it shone, and every useful thing lay ready to his hand. Not a paper out of its order, or a pen out of its place. The charm was that he never caught her at it. In all her ministrations Rose was secret and silent and unseen.

Only every evening at nightfall he heard the street door open, and Rose's voice calling into the darkness, sending out a cry that had the magic and rhythm of a song, "Puss — Puss — Puss," she called; "Minny — Min — Min — Minny — Puss — Puss — Puss." That was the hymn with which Rose saluted the night. It ought to have irritated him, but it did n't.

It was all he heard of her, till on the fourth evening she broke her admirable silence. She had just removed the table-cloth, shyly, from under the book he was reading.

"It is n't good for you to read at meal-times, sir."

"I know it is n't. But what are you to do if you've nobody to talk to?"

A long silence. It seemed as if Rose was positively thinking.

"You should go out more, sir."

"I don't like going out."

Silence again. Rose had folded up the cloth and put it away in its drawer. Yet she lingered.

"Would you like to see the little dogs, sir?"

"Little dogs? I did n't know there were any."

"We keep them very quiet; but we've seven. We've a fox and a dandy" (Rose grew breathless with excitement), "and an Aberdeen, and two Aberdeen pups, and two Poms, a mole and a white. May they come up, sir?"

"By all means let them come up."

She ran down-stairs, and returned with the seven little dogs

at her heels. Tanqueray held out his hand invitingly. (He was fond of animals.) The fox and the dandy sniffed him suspiciously. The old Aberdeen ran away from him backwards, showing her teeth. Her two pups sat down in the doorway and yapped at him.

Rose tried not to laugh, while the Poms ran round and round her skirts, panting with their ridiculous exertions.

"That's Prince—the mole—he's a pedigree dog. He does n't belong to us. And this," said Rose, darting under the table and picking up the white Pom, "this is Joey."

The white Pom leaped in her arms. He licked her face in a rapture of affection.

"Is Joey a pedigree dog, too?" said Tanqueray.

"Yes," said Rose. She met his eyes without flinching.

"So young a dog——"

"No, sir, Joey's not so very young."

She was caressing the little thing tenderly, and Tanqueray saw that there was something wrong with Joey.

Joey was deplorably lean and puny, and his hair, which should have stood out till Joey appeared three times the size he was, his hair, what hair he had, lay straight and limp along his little back. Rose passed her hand over him the wrong way.

"You should always brush a Pom the wrong way, sir. It brings the hair on."

"I'm afraid, Rose, you've worn his hair away with stroking it."

"Oh no, sir. That's the peculiarity of Joey's breed. Joey's my dog, sir."

"So I see."

He saw it all. Joey was an indubitable mongrel, but he was Rose's dog, and she loved him, therefore Joey's fault, his hairlessness, had become the peculiarity, not to say the superiority, of Joey's breed.

She read his thoughts.

"We're taking great pains to bring it on before the tenth."

"The tenth?"

"The Dog Show, sir."

(Heavens above! She was going to show him!)

"And do you think you'll bring it on before the tenth?"

"Oh yes, sir. You've only got to brush a Pom's hair backwards and it comes."

The little dogs clamoured to be gone. She stooped, stroking them, smoothing their ears back and gazing into their eyes, lost in her own tenderness, and unaware that she was watched. If Rose had been skilled in the art of allurement she could not have done better than let him see how she loved all things that had life.

"How any one can be unkind to dumb animals," said Rose, musing.

She moved slowly to the door, gathering up the puppies in her arms, and calling to the rest to follow her. "Come along," she said, "and see what Pussy's doing."

He heard her voice going down-stairs saying, "Puss — Puss — Pussy — Min — Min — Min."

When she appeared to him the next day, Minny, the cat, was hanging by his claws on to her shoulder.

"Are you fond of cats, sir?"

"I adore them." (He did.)

"Would you like to have Minny, sir? He'll be nice company for you."

"Ought I to deprive you of his society?"

"I don't mind, sir. I've got the little dogs." She looked at him softly. "And you've got nothing."

"True, Rose. I've got nothing."

That evening, as he sat in his chair, with Rose's cat curled up on his knee, he found himself thinking, preposterously thinking, about Rose.

He supposed she was Mrs. Eldred's daughter. He did not like to think of her as Mrs. Eldred's daughter. She was charming now; but he had a vision of her as she might be in twenty years' time, grown shapeless and immense, and wheezing as Mrs. Eldred wheezed. Yet no; that was too horrible. You could not think of Rose as — wheezing. People did not always take after their mothers. Rose must have had a father. Of course, Eldred was

her father; and Eldred was a small man, lean and brown as a beetle; and he had never heard him wheeze.

At dinner-time Rose solved his doubt.

"Aunt says, sir, do you mind my waitin' on you?"

"I do not mind it in the very least."

"It's beginning to be a trouble to Aunt now to get up-stairs."

"I would n't dream of troubling your aunt."

Her aunt? Mrs. Eldred was not her mother. Ah, but you could take after your aunt.

He found that this question absorbed him more than was becoming. He determined to settle it.

"Are you going to stay here, then?" he asked, with guile.

"Yes, sir. I've come back to live with Uncle."

"Have you always lived here?"

"Yes, sir. Father left me to Uncle when he died."

"Then, Rose, Mrs. Eldred is not your aunt?"

"Oh no, sir," said Rose eagerly.

Tanqueray felt a relief out of all proportion to its cause.

He continued the innocent conversation.

"And so you're going to look after me, are you?"

"Yes," said Rose. He noticed that when she dropped the "sir," it was because her voice drew itself back with a little gasping breath.

"And your aunt, you think, really won't be equal to it?"

"Well, sir, you see, she gets all of a flutter like, and then she w'ezees, and she knows that's irritating for you to hear." She paused. "And Aunt was afraid that if you was irritated, sir, you'd go. Nothin' could keep you."

(How thoroughly they understood him!)

"Well, I'm not irritated any more. But it is unfortunate, is n't it, that she — er — wheezes?"

He had tried before now to make Rose laugh. He wanted to see how she did it. It would be a test. And he perceived that, somewhere behind her propriety, Rose cherished a secret, iniquitous enjoyment of her aunt.

An imp of merriment danced in Rose's eyes, but the rest of



"How any one can be unkind to dumb animals," said Rose, musing

her face was graver than ever. ("Good," he thought; "she does n't giggle.")

"Oh, Mr. Tanqueray, talk of w'eezin', you should hear Aunt snore."

"I have heard her. In my dreams."

Rose, abashed at her own outburst, remained silent for several minutes. Then she spoke again.

"Do you think, sir, you could do without me on the tenth?"

"No. I don't think I could possibly do without you."

Her face clouded. "Not just for the tenth?"

"Why the tenth?"

"The Dog Show, sir. And Joey's in it."

"I forgot."

"Miss Kentish, the lady up-stairs, is going for her holiday on the tenth."

He saw that she was endeavouring to suggest that if he could n't do without her, he and he alone would be keeping her from the superb spectacle of the Dog Show with Joey in it.

"So you want me to go for a holiday, too. Is that it?"

"Well, sir, if it's not inconvenient, and you don't really mind Aunt——"

"Does n't she want to see Joey, too?"

"Not if you required her, sir."

"I don't require her. I don't require anybody. I'm going away, like the lady up-stairs, for the tenth. I shall be away all day."

"Oh, thank you, sir." She glowed. "Do you think, sir, Joey'll get a prize?"

"Certainly, if you bring his hair on."

"It's coming. I've put paraffin all over him. You'd laugh if you were to see Joey now, sir."

Rose herself was absolutely serious.

"No, Rose, I should not laugh. I would n't hurt Joey's feelings for the world."

Tanqueray had his face hidden under the table where he was setting a saucer of milk for Minny, the cat.

Rose rejoiced in their communion. "He's quite fond of you, sir," she said.

"Of course he's fond of me," said Tanqueray, emerging. "Why should n't he be?"

"Well, Minny does n't take to everybody."

"I am more than honoured that he should take to me."

Rose accepted that statement with incorruptible gravity. It was the fifth day, and she had not laughed yet.

But on the seventh day he met her on the stairs going to her room. She carried a lilac gown over her arm and a large hat in her hand. She was smiling at the hat. He smiled at her.

"A new gown for the Rose Show?"

"The Dog Show, sir." She stood by to let him pass.

"It's the same thing. I say, what a howling swell you'll be." At that Rose laughed (at last he had made her).

She ran up-stairs; and through a door ajar, he heard her singing in her own room.

III

IN Tanqueray's memorandum-book for nineteen hundred and two there stands this note: "June 10th. Rose Show. Remember to take a holiday."

Rose, he knew, was counting the days till the tenth.

About a fortnight before the tenth, Tanqueray was in bed, ill. He had caught a cold by walking furiously, and then lying out on the grass in the chill of the May evening. There was a chance, Rose said, of its turning to influenza and bronchitis, and it did.

He was so bad that Mrs. Eldred dragged herself up-stairs to look at him.

"Bed's the best place, sir, for you," she said. "So just you lie quiet 'ere, sir, and Rose'll look after you. And if there's anything you fancy, sir, you tell Rose, and I'll make it you."

There was nothing that he fancied but to lie still there and look at Rose when, in a spare hour, she sat by his window, sewing. Bad as he was, he was not so far gone as to be ever oblivious of her presence. Even at his worst, one night when he had had a touch of fever, he was aware of her wandering in and out of his room, hanging over him with a thermometer, and sitting by his bedside. When he flung the clothes off she was there to cover him; when his pillow grew hot she turned it; when he cried out with thirst she gave him a cool drink.

In the morning she was pale and heavy-eyed; her hair was all unsleeked, and its round coils were flattened at the back. She had lain down on her bed, dressed, for five minutes at a time, but she had not closed her eyes or her ears all night.

In a week he was well enough to enjoy being nursed. He was now exquisitely sensitive to the touch of her hands, and to the nearness of her breathing mouth as her face bent over him,



tender, absorbed, and superlatively grave. What he liked best of all was to hold out his weak hands to be washed and dried by hers; that, and having his hair brushed.

He could talk to her now without coughing. Thus —

“I say, what a bother I am to you.”

Rose had taken away the basin and towels, and was arranging his hair according to her own fancy. And Rose’s fancy was to part it very much on one side, and brush it back in a curl off his forehead. It gave him a faint resemblance to Mr. Robinson, the elegant young draper in the High Street, whom she knew.

“There’s nothing I like so much,” said she, “as tucking people up in bed and ’aving them lie there and nursing ’em. Give me anybody ill, and anybody ’elpless, and me lookin’ after ’em, and I’m happy.”

“And the longer I lie here, Rose, the happier you’ll be?”

“Yes. But I want you to get well, too, sir.”

“Because you’re so unselfish.”

“Oh no. There is n’t anybody selfisher than me.”

“I suppose,” said Tanqueray, “that’s why I *don’t* get well.”

Rose had a whole afternoon to spare that day. She spent it turning out his drawers and finding all the things there were to mend there. She was sitting by his bed, when, looking up from her mending, she saw his eyes fixed on her.

“I don’t irritate you, sittin’ here, do I, sir?”

“Irritate me? What do you think I’m made of?”

Rose meditated for the fraction of a second.

“Brains, sir,” said she.

“So you think you know a man of brains when you see him, do you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What were you, Rose, before you came here?”

“I was nurse in a gentleman’s family. I took care of the baby.”

“Did you like taking care of the baby?”

“Yes.”

Rose blushed profoundly and turned away. He wondered why.

"I had a bad dream last night," said Tanqueray. "I dreamt that your aunt got into this room and could n't get out again. I'm afraid of your aunt."

"I dare say, sir. Aunt is so very 'uge."

Rose dropped her g's and, when deeply moved, her aitches; but he did not mind. If it had to be done, it could n't be done more prettily.

"Rose, do you know when I'm delirious and when I'm not?"

"Yes, sir. You see, I take your temperature."

"It must be up now to a hundred and eighty. You must n't be alarmed at anything I say. I'm not responsible."

"No, sir." She rose and gravely took his temperature.

"Are n't you afraid of my biting the bulb off, and the quick-silver flying down my throat, and running about inside me for ever and ever?"

"No, sir."

"You don't seem to be afraid of anything."

"I'm not afraid of many things, and I would never be afraid of you, sir."

"Not if I went mad, Rose? Raving?"

"No. Not if you went mad. Not if you was to strike me, I would n't." She paused. "Not so long as I knew you was reelly mad, and did n't mean to hurt me."

"I would n't hurt you for the world."

He sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

That evening, when she was giving him his medicine, he noticed that her eyelids were red and her eyes gleaming.

"You've been crying. What's made you cry?"

Rose did not answer.

"What is it?"

"Miss Kentish keeps on callin' and callin' me. And she scolds me something awful when I don't come."

"Give my compliments to Miss Kentish, Rose, and tell her she's a beast."

"I've told her that if it was she that was ill I'd nurse her just the same and be glad to do it."

"You consider that equivalent to calling her a beast, do you?"

Rose said, "Well——" It was a little word she used frequently.

"Well, I'm sorry you think I'm a beast."

Rose's face had a scared look. She could not follow him, and that frightened her. It is always terrifying to be left behind. So he spared her.

"Why would you be glad to nurse Miss Kentish?"

"Because," said Rose, "I like taking care of people."

"Do you like taking care of me?"

Rose was silent again. She turned suddenly away. It was the second time she had done this, and again he wondered why.

By the eighth day Tanqueray was strong enough to wash his own hands and brush his own hair. On the ninth the doctor and Rose agreed that he might sit up for an hour or two in his chair by the window. On the eleventh he came down-stairs for dinner. On the thirteenth Rose had nothing more to do for him but to bring him his meals and give him his medicine, which he would otherwise have forgotten.

At bed-time, therefore, he had two sovereigns ready for her in an envelope. Rose refused obstinately to take them; to have anything to do with sovereigns.

"No, sir, I could n't," she reiterated.

But when he pressed them on her she began to cry.

And that left him wondering more.

IV

ON the fourteenth day, Tanqueray, completely recovered, went out for a walk. And the first thing he did when he got back was to look at his note-book to see what day of the month it was.

It was the tenth, the tenth of June, the day of the Dog Show. And the memorandum stared him in the face: "Rose Show. Remember to take a holiday."

He looked in the paper. The show began at ten. And here he was at half-past one. And here was Rose, in her old green and brown, bringing in his luncheon.

"Rose," he said severely, "why are you not at the Rose Show?"

Rose lowered her eyes. "I did n't want to go, sir."

"How about the new gown?"

(He remembered it.)

"That don't matter. Aunt's gone instead of me."

"Wearing it? She could n't. Get into it at once, and leave that confounded cloth alone and go. You've plenty of time."

She repeated that she did not want to go, and went on laying the cloth.

"Why not?" said he.

"I don't want to leave you, sir."

"Do you mean to say you've given up that Dog Show — with Joey in it — for me?"

"Joey is n't in it; and I'd rather be here looking after you."

"I won't be looked after. I insist on your going. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir, I hear you."

"And you're going?"

"No, sir." She meditated with her head a little on one side;

a way she had. "I've got a headache, and — and — and I don't want to go and see them other dogs, sir."

"Oh, that's it, is it? A feeling for Joey?"

But by the turn of head he knew it was n't. Rose was lying, the little minx.

"But you *must* go somewhere. You *shall* go somewhere. You shall go — I say, supposing you go for a drive with me?"

"You must n't take me for drives, sir."

"Must n't I?"

"I don't want you to give me drives — or — or anything."

"I see. You are to do all sorts of things for me, and I'm not to be allowed to do anything for you."

She placed his chair for him in silence, and as he seated himself he looked up into her face.

"Do you want to please me, Rose?"

Her face was firm as she looked at him. It was as if she held him in check by the indomitable set of her chin, and the steady light of her eyes. (Where should he be if Rose were to let herself go?)

Her mouth trembled, it protested against these austerities and decisions. It told him dumbly that she did want, very much, to please him; but that she knew her place.

Did she? Did she indeed know her place? Did he know it?

"You're right, Rose. That is n't the way I ought to have put it. Will you do me the honour of going for a drive with me?"

She looked down, troubled and uncertain.

"It can be done, Rose," he said, answering her thoughts.

"It can be done. The only thing is, would you like it?"

"Yes, sir, I would like it very much."

"Can you be ready by three o'clock?"

At three she was ready.

She wore the lilac gown she had bought for the Show, and the hat. It had red roses in it.

He did not like her gown. It was trimmed with coarse lace, and he could not bear to see her in anything that was not fine.

"Is anything wrong with my hair?" said Rose.

"No, nothing's wrong with your hair, but I think I like you better in the green and brown ——"

"That's only for every day."

"Then I shall like you better every day."

"Why do you like my green and brown dress?"

He looked at her again and suddenly he knew why.

"Because you had it on when I first saw you. I say, would you mind awfully putting it on instead of that thing?"

She did mind, awfully; but she went and put it on. And still there was something wrong with her. It was her hat. It did not go with the green and brown. But he felt that he would be a brute to ask her to take that off, too.

They drove to Hendon and back. They had tea at "Jack Straw's Castle." (Rose's face surrendered to that ecstasy.) And then they strolled over the West Heath and found a hollow where Rose sat down under a birch-tree and Tanqueray stretched himself at her feet.

"Rose," he said suddenly, "do you know what a wood-nymph is?"

"Well," said Rose, "I suppose it's some sort of a little animal."

"Yes, it's a little animal. A delightful little animal."

"Can you catch it and stroke it?"

"No. If you tried it would run away. Besides, you're not allowed to catch it, or to stroke it. The wood-nymph is very strictly preserved."

Rose smiled; for though she did not know what a wood-nymph was, she knew that Mr. Tanqueray was looking at her all the time.

"The wood-nymphs always dress in green and grown."

"Like me?"

"Like you. Only they don't wear boots" (Rose hid her boots), "nor yet collars."

"You would n't like to see me without a collar."

"I'd like to see you without that hat."

Any difficulty in taking Rose about with him would lie in Rose's hat. He could not say what was wrong with it except that the roses in it were too red and gay for Rose's gravity.

"Would you mind taking it off?"

She took it off and put it in her lap. Surrendered as she was, she could not disobey. The eternal spell was on her.

Tanqueray removed her hat gently and hid it behind him. He laid his hands in her lap. It was deep delight to touch her. She covered his hands with hers. That was all he asked of her and all she thought of giving.

On all occasions which she was prepared for, Rose was the soul of propriety and reserve. But this, the great occasion, had come upon her unaware, and Nature had her will of her. Through Rose she sent out the sign and signal that he waited for. And Rose became the vehicle of that love which Nature fosters and protects; it was visible and tangible, in her eyes, and in her rosy face and in the naïf movements of her hands.

Sudden and swift and fierce his passion came upon him, but he only lay there at her feet, holding her hands, and gazing into her face, dumb, like any lover of her class.

Then Rose lifted her hands from his and spoke.

"What have you done with my hat?"

In that moment he had turned and sat on it.

Deliberately, yet impulsively, and without a twinge of remorse, he had sat on it. But not so that Rose could see him.

"I have n't done anything *with* it," said he, "I could n't do anything with a hat like that."

"You've 'idden it somewhere."

He got up slowly, feigning a search, and produced what a minute ago had been Rose's hat.

It was an absurd thing of wire and net, Rose's hat, and it had collapsed irreparably.

"Well, I declare, if you have n't gone and sat on it."

"It looks as if I had. Can you forgive me?"

"Well — if it was an accident."

He looked down upon her tenderly.

"No, Rose, it was not an accident. I could n't bear that hat."

He put his hand on her arm and raised her to her feet.

"And now," he said, "the only thing we can do is to go and get another one."

They went slowly back, she shamefaced and bareheaded, he leading her by the arm till they found themselves in Heath Street outside a magnificent hat-shop.

Chance took him there, for Rose, interrogated on the subject of hat-shops, was obstinately reticent.

But here, in this temple, in its wonderful window, before a curtain, on a stage, like actors in a gay drama, he saw hats; black hats and white hats; green and blue and rose-coloured hats; hats of all shapes and sizes; airily perched; laid upon velvet; veiled and unveiled; befeathered and beflowered. Hats of a beauty and a splendour before which Rose had stood many a time in awful contemplation, and had hurried past with eyes averted, leaving behind her the impermissible dream.

And now she had a thousand scruples about entering. He had hit, she said, on the most expensive shop in Hampstead. Miss Kentish would n't think of buying a hat there. No, she would n't have it. He must please, please, Mr. Tanqueray, let her buy herself a plain straw and trim it.

But he seized her by the arm and drew her in. And once in there was no more use resisting, it only made her look foolish.

Reality with its harsh conditions had vanished for a moment. It was like a funny dream to be there, in Madame Rodier's shop, with Mr. Tanqueray looking at her as she tried on innumerable hats, and Madame herself, serving her, putting the hats on the right way, and turning her round and round so that Mr. Tanqueray could observe the effect from every side of her.

Madame talked all the time to Mr. Tanqueray and ignored Rose.

Rose had a mortal longing for a rose-coloured hat, and Madame would n't let her have it. Madame, who understood Mr. Tan-

queray's thoughts better than if he had expressed them, insisted on a plain black hat with a black feather.

"That's madame's hat, sir," said Madame. "We must keep her very simple."

"We must," said Tanqueray, with fervour. He thought he had never seen anything so enchanting in its simplicity as Rose's face under the broad black brim with its sweeping feather.

Rose had to wear the hat going home. Tanqueray carried the old one in a paper parcel.

At the gate of the corner house he paused and looked at his watch.

"We've half-an-hour yet before we need go in. I want to talk to you."

He led her through the willows, and up the green slope opposite the house. There was a bench on the top, and he made her sit on it beside him.

"I suppose," he said, "you think that when we go in I shall let you wait on me, and it'll be just the same as it was before?"

"Yes, sir. Just the same."

"It won't, Rose, it can't. You may wait on me to-night, but I shall go away to-morrow."

She turned her face to him, it was dumb with its trouble.

"Oh no — no, sir — don't go away."

"I must. But before I go, I want to ask you if you'll be my wife ——"

The hands she held clasped in her lap gripped each other tight. Her mouth was set.

"I'm asking you now, Rose. To be my wife. My wife," he repeated fiercely, as if he repelled with violence a contrary suggestion.

"I can't be your wife, sir," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because," she said simply, "I'm not a lady."

At that Tanqueray cried, "Ah," as if she had hurt him.

"No, sir, I'm not, and you mustn't think of it."

"I shall think of nothing else, and talk of nothing else, until you say yes."

She shook her little head; and from the set of her chin he was aware of the extreme decision of her character.

He refrained from any speech. His hand sought hers, for he remembered how, just now, she had unbent at the holding of her hand.

But she drew it gently away.

"No," said she. "I look at it sensible. I can see how it is. You've been ill, and you're upset, and you don't know what you're doin' — sir."

"I do — madam."

She smiled and drew back her smile as she had drawn back her head. She was all for withdrawal.

Tanqueray in his attempt had let go the parcel that he held. She seized it in a practical, business-like manner which had the perfect touch of finality. Then she rose and went back to the house, and he followed her, still pleading, still protesting. But Rose made herself more than ever deaf and dumb. When he held the gate open for her she saw her advantage, darted in, and vanished (his divinity!) down the area steps.

She went up-stairs to her little garret, and there, first of all, she looked at herself in the glass. Her face was strange to her under the black hat with its sweeping feather. She shook her head severely at the person in the glass. She made her take off the hat with the feather and put it by with that veneration which attends the disposal of a best hat. The other one, the one with the roses, she patted and pulled and caressed affectionately, till she had got it back into something of the shape it had been, to serve for second best. Then she wished she had left it as it was.

She loved them both, the new one because he had given it her, and the old one because he had sat on it.

Finally she smoothed her hair to an extreme sleekness, put on a clean apron and went down-stairs.

In the evening she appeared to Tanqueray, punctual and

subservient, wearing the same air of reticence and distance with which she had waited on him first. He was to see, it seemed to say, that she was only little Rose Eldred, his servant, to whom it was not proper that he should speak.

But he did speak. He put his back to the door she would have escaped by, and kept her prisoned there, utterly in his power.

Rose, thus besieged, delivered her ultimatum.

"Well," she said, "you take a year to think it over sensible."

"A year?"

"A year. And if you're in the same mind then as you are now, p'raps I won't say no."

"A year? But in a year I may be dead."

"You come to me," said Rose, "if you're dyin'."

"And you'll have me then?" he said savagely.

"Yes. I'll 'ave you then."

But, though all night Tanqueray by turns raged and languished, it was Rose who, in the morning, looked about to die. Not that he saw her. He never saw her all that day. And at evening he listened in vain for her call at the gate, her salutation to the night: "Min — Min — Minny! Puss — Puss — Puss!"

For in the afternoon Rose left the house, attended by her uncle, who carried by its cord her little trunk.

In her going forth she wore a clean white linen gown. She wore, not the Hat, nor yet the sad thing that Tanqueray had sat on, but a little black bonnet, close as a cap, with a black velvet bow in the front, and black velvet strings tied beneath her chin.

It was the dress she had worn when she was nurse in a gentleman's family.

V

LATE in the evening of that day, Tanqueray, as he sat in miserable meditation, was surprised by the appearance of Mrs. Eldred. She held in her hand Rose's hat, the hat he had given her, which she placed before him on the table.

"You'll be good enough, sir," said Mrs. Eldred, "to take that back."

"Why should I take it back?" he replied, with that artificial gaiety which had been his habitual defence against the approaches of Mrs. Eldred.

"Because, it was all very well for you to offer Rose what you did, sir, and she'd no call to refuse it. But a 'at's different. There's meanin'," said Mrs. Eldred, "in a 'at."

Tanqueray looked at the hat.

"Meaning? If you knew all the meaning there is in that hat, Mrs. Eldred, you'd feel, as I do, that you knew *something*. Half the poetry that's been written has less meaning in it than that hat. That hat fulfills all the requirements of poetry. It is simple — extremely simple — and sensuous and passionate. Yes, passionate. It would be impossible to conceive a hat less afflicted with the literary taint. It stands, as I see it, for emotion reduced to its last and purest expression. In short, Mrs. Eldred, what that hat does n't mean is n't worth meaning."

"If you'd explain *your* meaning, sir, I should be obliged."

"I am explaining it. My meaning, Mrs. Eldred, is that Rose wore that hat."

"I know she did, sir, and she 'ad n't ought to 'ave wore it. I'm only askin' *you*, sir, to be good enough to take it back."

"Take it back? But whatever should I do with it? I can't wear it. I might fall down and worship it, but — No, I could n't wear it. It would be sacrilege."

That took Mrs. Eldred's breath away, so that she sat down and wheezed.

"Does Rose not know what that hat means?" he asked.

"No, sir. I'll say that for her. She didn't think till I arst her."

"Then — I think — you'd perhaps better send Rose to me."

"Sir?"

"Please send her to me. I want her."

"And you may want her, sir. Rose is n't here."

"Not here? Where is she? I must see her."

"Rose is visitin' in the country, for her 'ealth."

"Her health? Is she ill?"

Mrs. Eldred executed a vast gesture that dismissed Rose.

"Where is she?" he repeated. "I'll go down and see her."

"You will not, sir. Her uncle would n't hear of it."

"But, by God! he shall hear of it."

He rang the bell with fury.

"It's no use your ringin', sir. Eldred's out.

"What have you done this for?"

"To get the child out of harm's way, sir. We're not blamin' you, sir. We're blamin' 'er."

"Her? Her?"

"Properly speakin', we're not blamin' anybody. We're no great ones for blamin', me and Eldred. But, if you'll excuse my sayin' so, sir, there's a party would be glad of your rooms next month, a party takin' the 'ole 'ouse, and if you would be so good as to try and suit yourself elsewhere — Though we don't want to put you to no inconvenience, sir."

It was extraordinary, but the more Mrs. Eldred's meaning was offensive, the more her manner was polite. He reflected long afterwards that, really, a lady, in such difficult circumstances, could hardly have acquitted herself better.

"Oh, is that all? I'll go. But you'll give me Rose's address."

"You leave Rose alone, sir. Rose's address don't concern you."

"Rose's address concerns me a good deal more than my own, I can tell you. So you 'd better give it me."

"Look 'ere, sir. Are you actin' honest by that girl, or are you not?"

"What the devil do you mean by asking me that?"

His violence made her immense bulk tremble; but her soul stood firm.

"I dessay you mean no 'arm, sir. But we can't 'ave you playin' with 'er. That 's all."

"Playing with her? Playing?"

"Yes, playin'. Wot else is it? You know, sir, you ain't thinkin' of marryin' 'er."

"That 's just what I am thinking of."

"You 'ave n't told 'er that."

"I *have* told her. And, by Heaven! I 'll do it."

"You mean that, sir?"

"Of course I mean it. What else should I mean?"

She sat meditating, taking it in slowly.

"You 'll never make 'er 'appy, sir. Nor she you."

"She and I are the best judges of that."

"'Ave you spoke to 'er?"

"Yes. I told you I had."

"Not a word 'ave she said to *me*."

"Well, I dare say she would n't."

"Sir?"

"She would n't have me."

Mrs. Eldred's lower lip dropped, and she stared at Tanqueray.

"She would n't 'ave you? Then, depend upon it, that 's wot made 'er ill."

"Ill?"

"Yes, ill, sir. Frettin', I suppose."

"Where 's that address? Give it me at once."

"No, sir, I darsen't give it you. Eldred 'd never forgive me."

"Have n't I told you I 'm going to marry her?"

"I don't know, sir, as 'ow Rose'll marry *you*. When she's set, she's set. And if you'll forgive my saying it, sir, Rose is a good girl, but she's not in your class, sir, and it is n't suitable. And Rose, I dessay, she's 'ad the sense to see it so."

"She's got to see it as I see it. That address?"

Mrs. Eldred rose heavily. She still trembled.

"You'd best speak to her uncle. 'E'll give it you if 'e approves. And if 'e does n't 'e won't."

He stormed. But he was impotent before this monument of middle-class integrity.

"When will Eldred be back?"

"We're expecting of 'im nine o'clock to-night."

"Mind you send him up as soon as he comes in."

"Very good, sir."

She paused.

"Wot am I to do with that 'at?"

He looked at her and at the hat. He laughed.

"You can leave the hat with me."

She moved slowly away. "Stop!" he cried; "have you got such a thing as a band-box?"

"I think I might 'ave, sir; if I could lay my 'and on it."

"Lay your hand on it, then, and bring it to me."

She brought it. An enormous band-box, but brown, which was a good colour. He lowered the hat into it with care and shut the lid on it, reverently, as if he were committing some sacred emblem to its shrine.

He sat at his writing-table, tried to work and accomplished nothing. His heart waited for the stroke of nine.

At nine there came to his summons the little, lean, brown man, Rose's uncle. Eldred, who was a groom, was attired with excessive horsiness. He refused to come further into the room than its threshold, where he stood at attention, austere servile, and respectively despotic.

The interview in all points resembled Tanqueray's encounter with Mrs. Eldred; except that the little groom, who knew his world, was even more firmly persuaded that the gentleman was playing with his Rose.

"And we can't 'ave that, sir," said Eldred.

"You 're not going to have it."

"No, sir, we ain't," reiterated Eldred. "We can't 'ave any such goin's on 'ere."

"Look here — don't be an idiot — it is n't your business, you know, to interfere."

"Not my business? When 'er father left 'er to me? I should like to know what is my business," said Mr. Eldred hotly.

Tanqueray saw that he would have to be patient with him.

"Yes, *I* know. *That's* all right. Don't you see, Eldred, I 'm going to marry her."

But his eagerness awoke in Eldred a ghastlier doubt. Rose's uncle stood firmer than ever, not turning his head, but casting at Tanqueray a small, sidelong glance of suspicion.

"And *why* do you want to marry her, sir? You tell me that."

Tanqueray saw.

"Because I want her. And it's the only way to get her. Do you need me to tell you that?"

The man reddened. "I beg your pardon, sir."

"You beg *her* pardon, you mean."

Eldred was silent. He had been hit hard, that time. Then he spoke.

"Are you certain sure of your feelin's, sir?"

"I 'm certain of nothing in this world except my feelings."

"Because" (Eldred was slow but steady and indomitable in coming to his point), "because we don't want 'er 'eart broke."

"*You're* breaking it, you fool, every minute you stand there. Give me her address."

In the end he gave it.

Down-stairs, in the kitchen, by the ashes of the raked-out fire, he discussed the situation with his wife.

"Did you tell him plain," said Mrs. Eldred, "that we 'd 'ave no triffin'?"

"I did."

"Did you tell 'im that if 'e was not certain sure 'e wanted 'er, there was a young man who did?"

Eldred said nothing to that question. He lit a pipe and began to smoke it.

"Did you tell 'im," his wife persisted, "about Mr. Robinson?"

"No, I did n't, old girl."

"Well, if it 'ad bin me I should have said, 'Mr. Tanqueray, for all you've fam'ly on your side and that, we're not so awful anxious for Rose to marry you. We'd rather 'ave a young man without fam'ly, in a good line o' business and steady risin'. And we know of such as would give 'is 'ead to 'ave 'er.' That's wot I should 'ave said."

"I dessay you would. I did n't say it, because I don't want 'im to 'ave 'er. That I don't. And if 'e was wantin' to cry off, and I was to have named Mr. Robinson, that'd 'ave bin the very thing to 'ave stirred 'im up to gettin' 'er. That's wot men is, missis, and women, too, all of 'em I've ever set eyes on. Dorgs wot'll leave the bone you give 'em, to fight for the bone wot another dorg 'e's got. Wot do you say to that, Mrs. Smoker, old girl?"

Mrs. Smoker, the Aberdeen, pricked up her ears and smiled, with her eyes only, after the manner of her breed.

"Anyhow," said Mrs. Eldred, "you let 'im see as 'ow we was n't any way snatchin' at 'im?"

"I did, missis."

VI

MR. ELDRED, groom and dog fancier, profoundly musing upon human nature and illuminated by his study of the lower animals, had hit upon a truth. Once let him know that another man desired to take Rose away from him and Mr. Tanqueray would be ten times more desirous to have her. What Mr. Eldred did not see was the effect upon Mr. Tanqueray of Rose's taking herself away, or he would not have connived at her departure. "Out o' sight, out o' mind," said Mr. Eldred, arguing again from his experience of the lower animals.

But with Tanqueray, as with all creatures of powerful imagination, to be out of sight was to be perpetually in mind.

All night, in this region of the mind, Rose's image did battle with Jane's image and overcame it,

It was not only that Jane's charm had no promise for his senses. She was unfit in more ways than one. Jane was in love with him; yet her attitude implied resistance rather than surrender. Rose's resistance, taking, as it did, the form of flight, was her confession of his power. Jane held her ground; she stood erect. Rose bowed before him like a flower shaken by the wind. He loved Rose because she was small and sweet and subservient. Jane troubled and tormented him. He revolted against the tyranny of Jane.

Jane was not physically obtrusive, yet there were moments when her presence in a room oppressed him. She had further that disconcerting quality of all great personalities, the power to pursue and seize, a power so oblivious, so pure from all intention or desire, that there was no flattery in it for the pursued. It persisted when she was gone. Neither time nor space removed her. He could not get away from Jane. If he allowed himself to think of her he could not think of anything else.

But he judged that Rose's minute presence in his memory would not be disturbing to his other thoughts.

His imagination could play tenderly round Rose. Jane's imagination challenged his. It stood, brandishing its flaming sword before the gates of any possible paradise. There was something in Jane that matched him, and, matching, rang defiance to his supremacy. Jane plucked the laurel and crowned herself. Rose bowed her pretty head and let him crown her. Laurel crowns, crowns of glory, for Jane. The crown of roses for Rose.

He meant, of course, the wedding-wreath and the wedding-ring. His conversation with the Eldreds had shown him that marriage had not entered into their humble contemplations; also that if there was no question of marriage, there could be no question of Rose.

He had known that in the beginning, he had known it from the uncompromising little Rose herself. From the first flowering of his passion until now, he had seen marriage as the sole means to its inevitable end. Tanqueray had his faults, but it was not in him to bring the creature he loved to suffering and dishonour. And the alternative, in Rose's case, was not dishonour, but frustration, which meant suffering for them both. He would have to give Rose up unless he married her.

At the moment, and the moment's vision was enough for him, he saw no reason why he should not marry her. He wanted to obtain her at once and to keep her for ever. She was not a lady and she knew it; but she had a gentleness, a fineness of the heart which was the secret of her unpremeditated charm. Without it Rose might have been as pretty as she pleased, she would not have pleased Tanqueray. He could withstand any manifestly unspiritual appeal, restrained by his own fineness and an invincible disdain. Therefore, when the divine folly fell upon him, he was like a thing fresh from the last touch of the creator, every sense in him unworn and delicate and alert.

And Rose had come to him when the madness of the quest was on him, a madness so strong that it overcame his perception of her social lapses. It was impossible to be unaware of some

of them, of certain phrases, of the sudden wild flight of her aspirates. But these things were entangled with her adorable gestures, with the soft ways of her mouth, with her look when she hung about him, nursing him; so that a sane judgment was impossible.

It was palpable, too, that Rose was not intellectual, that she was not even half-educated. But Tanqueray positively disliked the society of intellectual, cultivated women; they were all insipid after Jane. After Jane, he did not need intellectual companionship in his wife. He would still have Jane. And when he was tired of Jane there would, no doubt, be others; and when he was tired of all of them, there was himself.

What he did need in his wife was the obstinate, dumb devotion of a creature that had no life apart from him; a creature so small that in clinging it would hang no weight on his heart. And he had found it in Rose.

Why should he not marry her?

She was now, he had learned, staying with her former mistress at Fleet, in Hampshire.

The next morning he took a suitable train down to Fleet, and arrived, carrying the band-box, at the door of the house where Rose was. He sat a long time in the hall of the house with the band-box on his knees. He did not mind waiting. People went in and out of the hall and looked at him; and he did not care. He gloried in the society of the sacred band-box. He enjoyed the spectacle of his own eccentricity.

At last he was shown into a little room where Rose came to him. She came from behind, from the garden, through the French window. She was at his side before he saw her. He felt her then, he felt her fear of him.

He turned. "Rose," he said, "I've brought you the moon in a band-box."

"Oh," said Rose, and her cry had a thick, sobbing vibration in it.

He put his arm on her shoulder and drew her out of sight and kissed her, and she was not afraid of him any more.

"Rose," he said, "have you thought it over?"

"Yes, I have. Have you?"

"I've thought of nothing else."

"Sensible?"

"Oh, Lord, yes."

"You've thought of how I have n't a penny and never shall have?"

"Yes."

"And how I'm not clever, and how it is n't a bit as if I'd any head for studyin' and that?"

"Yes, Rose."

"Have you thought of how I'm not a lady? Not what you'd call a lady?"

There was no answer to that, and so he kissed her.

"And how you'd be if you was to marry some one who was a lady? Have you thought of that?"

"I have."

"Well then, it's this way. If you was a rich man I would n't marry you." She paused.

"But you will, because I'm a poor one?"

"Yes."

"Thank God I'm poor."

He drew her to him and she yielded, not wholly, but with a shrinking of her small body, and a soft, shy surrender of her lips.

She was thinking, "If he married a lady he'd have to spend ten times on her what he need on me."

All she said was, "There are things I can do for you that a lady could n't."

"Oh — don't — don't!" he cried. That was the one way she hurt him.

"What are you going to do with me now?" said she.

"I'm going to take you for a walk. We can't stay here."

"Can you wait?"

"I have waited."

She ran away and stayed away for what seemed an interminable time. Then somebody opened the door and handed

Rose in. Somebody kissed her where she stood in the doorway, and laughed softly, and shut the door upon Rose and Tanqueray.

Rose stood there still. "Do you know me?" said she, and laughed.

Somebody had transformed her, had made her slip her stiff white gown and dressed her in a muslin one with a belt that clipped her, showing her pretty waist. Somebody had taught her how to wear a scarf about her shoulders; and somebody had taken off that odious linen collar and bared the white column of her neck.

"*She* made me put it on," said Rose. "She said if I did n't, I could n't wear the hat."

Somebody, Rose's mistress, had been in Rose's secret. She knew and understood his great poem of the Hat.

Rose took it out of the band-box and put it on. Impossible to say whether he liked her better with it or without it. He thought without; for she had parted her hair in the middle and braided it at the back.

"Do you like my hair?" said she.

"Why did n't you do it like that before?"

"I don't know. I wanted to. But I did n't."

"Why not?"

Rose hid her face. "I thought," said she, "you'd notice, and think — and think I was after you."

No. He could never say that she had been after him, that she had laid a lure. No huntress she. But she had found him, the hunted, run down and sick in his dark den. And she had stooped there in the darkness, and tended and comforted him.

They set out.

"*She* said I was to tell you," said Rose, "to be sure and take me through the pine-woods to the pond."

How well that lady knew the setting that would adorn his Rose; sunlight and shadow that made her glide fawn-like among the tall stems of the trees. Through the pine-woods he took her, his white wood-nymph, and through the low lands covered

with bog myrtle, fragrant under her feet. Beyond the marsh they found a sunny hollow in the sand where the heath touched the pond. The brushwood sheltered them.

Side by side they sat and took their fill of joy in gazing at each other, absolutely dumb.

It was Tanqueray who broke that beautiful silence. He had obtained her. He had had his way and must have it to the end. He loved her; and the thing beyond all things that pleased him was to tease and torment the creatures that he loved.

"Rose," he said, "do you think I'm good-looking?"

"No. Not what you call good-looking."

"How do you know what I call good-looking?"

"Well — *me*. Don't you?"

"You're a woman. Give me your idea of a really handsome man."

"Well — do you know Mr. Robinson?"

"No. I do not know Mr. Robinson."

"Yes, you do. He keeps the shop in the High Street where you get your 'ankychiefs and collars. You bought a collar off of him the other day. He told me."

"By Jove, so I did. Of course I know Mr. Robinson. What about him?"

"Well — *he's* what I call a *handsome* man."

"Oh." He paused. "Would you love me more if I were as handsome as Mr. Robinson?"

"No. Not a bit more. I could n't. I'd love you just the same if you were as ugly as poor Uncle. There, what more do you want?"

"What, indeed? Rose, how much have you seen of Mr. Robinson?"

"How much? Well — I see him every time I go into his shop. And every Sunday evening when I go to church. And sometimes he comes and has supper with us. 'E plays and 'e sings beautiful."

"The devil he does! Well, did he ever take you anywhere?"

"Once — he took me to Madame Tussaws; and once to the Colonial Exhibition; and once ———"

"You minx. That'll do. Has he ever given you anything?"

"He gave me Joey."

"I always knew there was something wrong about that dog."

"And last Christmas he gave me a scented sashy from the shop."

"Never — anything else?"

"Never anything else." She smiled subtly. "I would n't let 'im."

"Well, well. And I suppose you consider Mr. Robinson a better dressed man than I am?"

"Yes, he was always a beautiful dresser. He makes it what you might call 'is hobby."

"Of course Mr. Robinson wants you to marry him?"

"Yes. Leastways he says so."

"And I suppose your uncle and aunt want you to marry him?"

"They were more for it than I was."

"Rose — he's got a bigger income than I have."

"He never told me what his income is."

"But you know?"

"I dare say Uncle does."

"Better dressed — decidedly more handsome ——"

"Well — he *is* that."

"A bigger income. Rose, do you want Mr. Robinson to be found dead in his shop — horribly dead — among the collars and the handkerchiefs — spoiling them, and — not — looking — handsome — any more?"

"Oh, Mr. Tanqueray!"

"Then don't talk about him."

He turned his face to hers. She put up her hands and drew his head down into the hollow of her breasts that were warm with the sun on them.

"Rose," he said, "if you stroke my hair too much it'll come off, like Joey's. Would you love me if my hair came off?"

She kissed his hair.

"When did you begin to love me, Rose?"

"I don't know. I think it must have been when you were ill."

"I see. When I was bowled over on my back and could n't struggle. What *made* you love me?"

She was silent a long time, smiling softly to herself.

"I think it was because — because — because you were so kind to Joey."

"So you thought I would be kind to you?"

"I did n't — I did n't think at all. I just ——"

"So did I," said Tanqueray.

VII

IT had been arranged that Rose was to be married from the house of her mistress, and that she was to remain there until her wedding-day. There were so many things to be seen to. There was the baby. You could n't, Rose said, play fast and loose with *him*. Rose, at her own request, had come to take care of the baby for a month, and she was not going back on that, not if it was ever so. Then there were all the things that her mistress, Rose said, was going to learn her. So many things, things she was not to do, things she was not to say, things she was on no account to wear. Rose, buying her trousseau, was not to be trusted alone for a minute.

It had been put to Rose, very gently by her mistress, very gravely by her master, whether she would really be happy if she married this eccentric young gentleman with the band-box. Was it not possible that she might be happier with somebody rather less eccentric? And Rose replied that she knew her own mind; that she could n't be happy at all with anybody else, and that, if she could, she'd rather be unhappy with Mr. Tanqueray, eccentricity, band-box and all. Whereas, if he was to be unhappy with *her*, now — But, when it came to that, they had n't the heart to tell her that he might, and very probably would be.

If Rose knew her own mind, Tanqueray knew his. The possibility of being unhappy with Rose (he had considered it) was dim compared with the certainty that he was unhappy without her. To be deprived of the sight and sound of her for six days in the week, to go down to Fleet, like the butcher, on a Sunday, and find her rosy and bright-eyed with affection, with a little passion that grew like his own with delay, that grew in silence and in secret, making Rose, every Sunday, more admirably shy;

to be with her for two hours, and then to be torn from her by a train he had to catch; all this kept Tanqueray in an excitement incompatible with discreet reflection.

Rose would not name a day before the fourteenth of July, not if it was ever so. He adored that little phrase of desperate negation. He was in a state of mind to accept everything that Rose did and said as adorable. Rose had strange audacities, strange embarrassments. Dumbness would come upon Rose in moments which another woman, Jane for instance, would have winged with happy words. She had a look that was anything but dumb, a look of innocent tenderness, which in another woman, Jane again, would not have been allowed to rest upon him so long. He loved that look. In her very lapses, her gentle elision of the aitch, he found a foreign, an infantile, a pathetic charm.

So the date of the wedding was fixed for the fourteenth.

It was now the twelfth, and Tanqueray had not yet announced his engagement.

On the morning of the twelfth two letters came which made him aware of this omission. One was from young Arnott Nicholson, who wanted to know when, if ever, he was coming out to see him. The other was from Jane's little friend, Laura Gunning, reminding him that the twelfth was Jane's birthday.

He had forgotten.

Yet there it stood in his memorandum-book, entered three months ago, lest by any possibility he should forget.

How, in the future, was he going to manage about birthdays? For, whenever any of the three had a birthday, they all celebrated it together. Last time it had been Tanqueray's birthday, and they had made a day of it, winding up with supper in little Laura's rooms. Such a funny, innocent supper that began with maccaroni, and ended, he remembered, with bread and jam. Before that, it had been Laura's birthday, and Tanqueray had taken them all to the play. But on Jane's birthday (and on other days, *their* days) it was their custom to take the train into the country, to tramp the great white roads, to loiter in the fields, to climb the hillsides and lie there, prone, with slackened

limbs, utterly content with the world, with each other and themselves. As he thought of those days, their days, he had a sudden vision of his marriage-day as a dividing line, sundering him from them, their interests and their activities. He could not think of Rose as making one of that company.

Laura now inquired innocently what his plans were for that day. Would he meet them (she meant, would he meet her and Jane Holland) at Marylebone, by the entrance, at eleven o'clock, and go with them somewhere into the country?

Would he? He thought about it for five minutes, and decided that on the whole he would rather go than not. He was restless in these days before his wedding. He could not stand the solitude of this house where Rose had been and was not. And he wanted to see Jane Holland again and make it right with her. He was aware that in many ways he had made it wrong.

He would have to tell her. He would have to tell Nicholson. And Nicholson, why, of course, Nicholson would have to see him through. He must go to Nicholson at once.

Nicholson lived at Wendover. There was a train from Marylebone about eleven. It was possible to combine a festival for Jane with a descent upon Nicky.

By the entrance, at eleven, Laura Gunning waited for him, punctually observant of the hour. Beyond, on the pavement before the station, he saw the tall figure of another woman. It was Nina Lempriere. She was not waiting—Nina never waited—but striding impatiently up and down. He would have to reckon, then, with Nina Lempriere, too. He was glad that Jane was with her.

Little Laura, holding herself very straight, greeted him with her funny smile, a smile that was hardly more than a tremor of her white lips. Laura Gunning, at twenty-seven, had still in some of her moods the manner of a child. She was now like a seven-year-old made shy and serious by profound excitement. She was a very small woman and she had a small face, with diminutive features in excessively low relief, a face shadowless as a child's. Everything about Laura Gunning was small and finished with an innocent perfection. She had a small and

charming talent for short stories, little novels, perfect within the limits of their kind.

Tanqueray laid before her his Wendover scheme. Laura said he must ask Jane. It was Jane's birthday. Jane, being asked, said, No, she did n't mind where they went, provided they went somewhere. She supposed there was a gate they could sit on, while Tanqueray called on Nicky. Tanqueray said he thought he saw Nicky letting her sit on a gate. Considering that Nicky had been pestering him for the last six months (he had) to bring her out to have tea with him on one of their days.

"And we've never been," said he.

Jane let it pass. But Nina Lempriere, as Tanqueray well knew, had a devil in her. Nina's eyes had the trick of ignoring your position in the space they traversed, which made it the more disconcerting when they came back and fixed you with their curious, hooded stare. They were staring at Tanqueray now.

"Where have you been?" said she. "We have n't heard of you for ages."

"I've been ill."

Jane looked at him and said nothing.

"Ill? And you never told us?" said Nina.

"I was all right. I was well looked after."

"Who looked after you?"

He did not answer her. For in that instant there rose before him the image of Rose Eldred, tender and desirable, and it kept him dumb.

Nina, whose devil was nothing if not persistent, repeated her question. He divined already in Nina a secret, subtle hostility.

"Oh," he said abruptly. "I looked after myself."

Jane stared intently at a notice of the departure and arrival of trains.

Laura, aware of embarrassment somewhere, began to talk to him light-heartedly, in her fashion, and the moment passed.

In the train, going down to Wendover, Laura talked to Jane. Nina did not talk. Her queer eyes, when they looked at him, had a light in them of ironic devilry and suspicion. They left

him speculating on the extent to which he was cutting himself off. This journey down to Wendover was a stage in the process. He was going down to tell Nicholson, to ask Nicholson to see him through.

How would Jane take it? How would Nina? How would Laura? He had said to himself, light-heartedly, that his marriage would make no difference, that he should retain them, all three, as an intellectual seraglio. Would this, after all, be possible? When they heard that he, George Tanqueray, was marrying a servant in a lodging-house?

Aware now, vividly aware, of the things he was doing, he asked himself why, if he was not in love with Jane, he had not been in love with Nina? Nina had shown signs. Yes, very unmistakably she had shown signs. He could recall a time when there had lurked a betraying tenderness about her ironic mouth; when her queer eyes, as they looked at him, took on a certain softness and surrender. It had not touched him. To his mind there had always been something a little murky about Nina. It was the fault, no doubt, of her complexion. Not but what Nina had a certain beauty, a tempestuous, haggard, Roman eagle kind of beauty. She looked the thing she was, a creature of high courage and prodigious energy. Besides, she had a devil. Without it, he doubted whether even her genius (he acknowledged, a little grudgingly, her genius) could have done all it did.

It had entered into Tanqueray's head (though not his heart) to be in love with Jane. But never, even by way of fantasy, had it entered it to be in love with Nina; though it was to Nina that he looked when he wanted the highest excitement in his intellectual seraglio. He could not conceive any man being in love with her, to the extent, that is to say, of trying to marry her. Nina had the thing called temperament, more temperament and murkier than he altogether cared for; but, as for marrying, you might as well try to marry some bird of storm on the wing, or a flash of lightning on its career through heaven. Nina — career and all — was pre-eminently unfit.

She had shown, more than once, this ironic antagonism, as if she knew what he thought of her, and owed him a grudge.

If not Nina, why not Laura? She was small and she was pretty and she was pathetic, and he liked women to be so. Why was it that with all her feminine smallness and prettiness and pathos he had never cared for her?

They were talking.

"Tired, Laura?" Jane asked.

"Only sleepy. Papa had another dream last night."

They laughed. So did Laura, though her tragedy was there, the tragedy which had given her that indomitable face.

Laura lived under conditions which would have driven Tanqueray mad. She had a father; she who, as Jane said, could least of all of them afford a father. Her father had had a sun-stroke, and it had made him dream dreams. He would get up a dozen times in the night and wander in and out of Laura's bedroom, and sit heavily on her bed and tell her his dreams, which terrified Laura.

"It was n't funny, this time," said she. "It was one of his horrid ones."

Nobody laughed then. They were dumb with the pity and horror of it. Laura's father, when he was awake, was the most innocent, most uninspired, most uncreative of old gentlemen; but in his dreams he had a perfect genius for the macabre. The dreams had been going on for about a year, and they were making Laura ill. Tanqueray knew it, and it made him sad.

That was why he had not cared to care for Laura.

Yet little Laura, very prettily, very innocently, with an entire unconsciousness, had let him see where her heart was. And as prettily and innocently and unconsciously as he could, he had let her see that her heart was no concern of his, any more than Nina's.

And she had not cherished any resentment, she had not owed him any grudge. She had withdrawn herself, still prettily, still innocently, so that she seemed, with an absurd prettiness, to be making room for Jane.

He had even a vague recollection of himself as acquiescing in her withdrawal, on those grounds. It was almost as if there had been an understanding between him and Laura, between

Jane and Laura, between him and Jane. They had behaved perfectly, all three. What made their perfection was that in all these withdrawals, acquiescences and understandings not one of them had given any outward sign. They had kept their spoken compact. They had left each other free.

As for his mere marriage, he was certain with all of them to be understood. It was their business, as they had so often told each other, to understand. But he was not sure that he wanted to be understood with the lucidity, the depth, the prodigious thoroughness of which they were capable.

He said to himself, "The blood of these women is in their brains." That was precisely what he had against them.

VIII

IT was a perfect day, Jane's birthday, like a young June day, a day of the sun, of white distances and vivid foregrounds.

Wendover Hill looked over Arnott Nicholson's white house and over his green garden, where, summer and winter through, there brooded a heavenly quiet, a perfect peace. It was strange and sad, said Tanqueray, that a quiet and peace like that should be given to Nicky — to write poems in. Jane said it was sadder and stranger that verse so vile should flow from anything so charming, so perfect in its way as Nicky.

"Do you think," said she, as they crowded on his doorstep, "do you think he'll be at home?"

"Rather. We shall find him in his library, among his books and his busts, seething in a froth of abominable manuscripts, and feeling himself immortal."

Arnott Nicholson was at home, and he was in his library, with his books and his busts, and with Gisborne's great portrait of Jane Holland (the original) above his chimney-piece. He was, as Tanqueray had predicted, seething in his froth. Their names came to him there — Miss Holland and Mr. Tanqueray. In a moment Nicky was out of his library and into his drawing-room.

He was a singularly attractive person, slender, distinguished, highly finished in black and white. He was dressed, not like a candidate for immorality, but in the pink of contemporary perfection.

He was shyly, charmingly glad to see them. And delighted, of course, he said, to see Miss Lempriere and Miss Gunning. He insisted on their all staying to tea, to dinner, on their giving him, now that they had come, a day. He ordered whisky and

soda and lemonade. He brought peaches and chocolates and cigarettes, and offered them diffidently, as things mortal and savouring of mortality.

He went to and fro, carrying himself humbly yet with triumph, like one aware that he entertained immortal guests. He could n't get over it, he said, their dropping in on him like this, with a divine precipitance, out of their blue. Heavens! Supposing he had been out! He stood there glowing at them, the most perfect thing in his perfect drawing-room.

It was a room of old chintzes and old china, of fragile, distinguished furniture, of family portraits, of miniatures in medallions, and great bowls of roses everywhere. The whole house had a strange feminine atmosphere, a warm look as if a woman's hand had passed over it. Yet it was Nicky who was the soul of his house, a slender soul, three parts feminine.

Nicky was looking at Jane as she stooped over the roses. "Do you know," he said, "that you've come home? Come and see yourself."

He led the way into his library where her portrait looked down from its high place.

"You bought it?" said she.

"Rather. Gisborne painted it for me."

"Oh, Nicky!"

"It's your genius brooding over mine — I mean over me."

He looked at her again. When he looked at you Nicky's perfect clothes, his long chin, his nose that seemed all bridge, his fine little black moustache, Nicky himself retreated into insignificance beneath his enormous, prominent black eyes.

"I put you there," he said, "to inspire me."

Nicky's eyes gazed at you with a terrible solemnity whenever he talked about his inspiration.

"Do I?"

She did. They had caught him in the high act of creation. He'd been at it since ten o'clock; sitting there, with the blood, he said, beating so furiously in his brain that if he'd gone on like that he'd have destroyed himself. His head was burning now.

"We'll drag you, Nicky, to the top of Wendover Hill, and air you thoroughly. You reek," said Tanqueray.

His idea always was that they took Nicky out of doors to air him; he had so strongly the literary taint.

Nicky declared that he would have been willing to be dragged with them anywhere. Only, as it happened, he had to be at home. He was expecting Miss Bickersteth. They knew Miss Bickersteth?

They knew her. Nicky, for purposes of his own, was in the habit of cultivating, assiduously, the right people; and Miss Bickersteth was eminently right.

The lady, he said, might be upon them any minute.

"In that case," said Tanqueray, "we'll clear out."

"*You* clear out? But you're the very people he wants to see."
"He?"

"Hugh Brodrick. Miss Bickersteth was bringing Hugh Brodrick."

They smiled. Miss Bickersteth was always bringing somebody or being brought.

Brodrick was the right man to bring. He implored them to stay and meet Brodrick.

"Who is Brodrick?"

Brodrick, said Nicky, was a man to be cultivated, to be cherished, to be clung to and never to be let go. Brodrick was on the "*Morning Telegraph*," and at the back of it, and everywhere about it. And the Jews were at the back of Brodrick. So much so that he was starting a monthly magazine — for the work of the great authors only. That was his, Brodrick's, dream. He didn't know whether he could carry it through. Nicky supposed it would depend on the authors. No, on the advertisements, Brodrick told him. That was where he had the pull. He could work the "*Telegraph*" agency for that. And he had the Jews at the back of him. He was going to pay his authors on a scale that would leave the popular magazines behind him.

"He sounds too good to be true," said Jane.

"Or is he," said Tanqueray, "too true to be altogether good?"

"He is n't true, in your sense, at all. That's the beauty of him. He's a gorgeous dream. But a dream that can afford to pay for itself."

"A dream with Jews at its back," said Tanqueray.

"And he wants — he told me — to secure you first, Miss Holland. And Mr. Tanqueray. And he's sure to want Miss Lempriere and Miss Gunning. You'll all be in it. It's the luckiest thing that you came in to-day, of all days."

In fact, Nicky suggested that if the finger of Providence was ever to be seen clearly working anywhere, it was working here.

A bell in the distance tinkled gently, with a musical silver note. It was one of the perfections of Nicky's house that it had no jarring noises in it.

"That's he," said Nicky solemnly. "Excuse me."

And he went out.

He came back, all glowing and quivering, behind Miss Bickersteth and Mr. Hugh Brodrick.

Miss Bickersteth they all knew, said Nicky. His voice was unsteady with the overmastering sense of great presences, of Jane Holland, of Tanqueray, of Brodrick.

Brodrick was a man of about thirty-five, square-built, with a torso inclined to a somewhat heavy slenderness, and a face with blunt but regular features, heavily handsome. One of those fair Englishmen who grow darker after adolescence; hair, moustache and skin acquiring a dull sombreness in fairness. But Brodrick's face gained in its effect from the dusky opacity that intensified the peculiar blueness of his eyes. They were eyes which lacked, curiously, the superficial social gaze, which fixed themselves, undeviating and intent, on the one object of his interest. As he entered they were fixed on Jane, turning straight to her in her corner.

This directness of aim rendered mediation almost superfluous. But Nicky, as the fervent adorer of Miss Holland, had brought to the ceremony of introduction a solemnity and mystery which he was in no mood to abate. It was wonderful how in spite of Brodrick he got it all in.

Brodrick was charged with a more formidable and less ap-

parent fire. Yet what struck Jane first in Brodrick was his shyness, his deference, his positive timidity. There was something about him that appealed to her, pathetically, to forget that he was that important person, a proprietor of the "Morning Telegraph." She would have said that he was new to any business of proprietorship. New with a newness that shone in his slumbering ardour; that at first sight seemed to betray itself in the very innocence, the openness of his approach. If it could be called an approach, that slow, indomitable gravitation of Brodrick toward Jane.

"Do you often come over to Wendover?" he said.

"Not very often."

There was a pause, then Brodrick said something again, but in so low a voice that Jane had to ask him what he said.

"Only that it's an easy run down from Marylebone."

"It is — very," said she, and she tried to draw him into conversation with Miss Lempriere and Miss Gunning.

It was not easy to draw him where he had not previously meant to go. He was a creature too unswerving, inadaptable for purely social purposes. For Nina and Laura he had only a blank courtesy. Yet he talked to them, he talked fluently, in an abstracted manner, while he looked, now at Jane, and now at her portrait by Gisborne. He seemed to be wondering quietly what she was doing there, in Nicky's house.

Nicky, as became him, devoted himself to Miss Bickersteth. She was on the reviewing staff of the "Morning Telegraph," and very valuable to Nicky. Besides, he liked her. She interested him, amused, amazed him. As a journalist she had strange perversities and profundities. She had sharpened her teeth on the "Critique of Pure Reason" in her prodigious teens. Yet she could toss off, for the "Telegraph," paragraphs of an incomparable levity. In the country Miss Bickersteth was a blustering, full-blooded Diana of the fields. In town she was intellect, energy and genial modernity made flesh. Even Tanqueray, who drew the line at the dreadful, clever little people, had not drawn it at Miss Bickersteth. There was something soothing in her large and florid presence. It had no ostensible air of journalism,

of being restlessly and for ever on the spot. You found it wherever you wanted it, planted fairly and squarely, with a look of having grown there.

Nicky, concealed beside Miss Bickersteth in a corner, had begun by trying to make her talk about Shelley (she had edited him). He hoped that thus he might be led on to talk about himself. To Nicky the transition was a natural one.

But Miss Bickersteth did not want to talk about Shelley. Shelley, she declared irreverently, was shop. She wanted to talk about people whom they knew, having reached the absolving age of forty, when you may say anything you please about anybody to an audience sufficiently discreet. And she had just seen Jane and Tanqueray going out together through the long window on to the lawn.

"I suppose," said she, "if they liked, they could marry now."

"Now?" repeated poor Nicky vaguely.

"Now that one of them has got an income."

"I did n't think he was a marrying man."

"No. And you would n't think, would you, she was a marrying woman?"

"I — I don't know. I have n't thought about it. He *said* he was n't going to marry."

"Oh." Two small eyes looked at him, two liquid, luminous spots in the pinkness of Miss Bickersteth's face.

"It's got as far as that, has it? That shows he's been thinking of it."

"I should have thought it showed he was n't."

Miss Bickersteth's mouth was decided in its set, and vague in its outline and its colouring. Her smile now appeared as a mere quiver of her face.

"How have you managed to preserve your beautiful innocence? Do you always go about with your head among the stars?"

"My head — ?" He felt it. It was going round and round.

"Yes. Is a poet not supposed ever to see anything under his exquisite nose?"

"I am not," said Nicky solemnly, "always a poet. And when a person tells me he is n't going to do a thing, I naturally think he is n't."

"And I naturally think he is. Whatever you think about George Tanqueray, *he's* sure to do the other thing."

"Come — if you can calculate on that."

"You can't calculate anything. Least of all with George Tanqueray. Except that he'll never achieve anything that is n't a masterpiece. If it's a masterpiece of folly."

"Mind you," she added, "I don't say he will marry Jane Holland, and I don't say it would be a masterpiece of folly if he did."

"What do you say?"

"That if he ever cares for any woman enough to marry her, it will be Jane."

"I see," said Nicky, after some reflection. "You think he's that sort?"

"I think he's a genius. What more do you want?"

"Oh, I don't want anything more," said Nicky, plunging head-first into a desperate ambiguity. He emerged. "What I mean is, when we've got Him, and when we've got Her — creators ——" He paused before the immensity of his vision of Them. "What business have we ——"

"To go putting one and one together so as to make two?"

"Well — it does n't seem quite reverent."

"You think them gods, then, your creators?"

"I think I — worship them."

"Ah, Mr. Nicholson, *you're* adorable. And I'm atrocious."

"I believe," said Nicky, "tea is in the garden."

"Let us go into the garden," said Miss Bickersteth.

And they went.

Tea was served in a green recess shut in from the lawn by high yew hedges. Nicky at his tea-table was more charming than ever, surrounded by old silver and fine linen, making tea delicately, and pouring it into fragile cups and offering it, doing everything with an almost feminine dexterity and grace.

After tea the group scattered and rearranged itself. In

Nicky's perfect garden, a garden of smooth grass plots and clipped yew-trees, of lupins and larkspurs, of roses that would have been riotous but for the restraining spirit of the place; in a green alley between lawn and orchard, Mr. Hugh Brodrick found himself with Miss Holland, and alone. Very quietly, very persistently, with eyes intent, he had watched for and secured this moment.

"You don't know," he was saying, "how I've wanted to meet you, and how hard I've worked for it."

"Was it so hard?"

"Hard is n't the word for it. If you knew the things I've done ——" He spoke in his low, even voice, saying eager and impulsive things without a sign of eagerness or impulse.

"What things?"

"Mean things, base things. Going on my knees to people I did n't know, grovelling for an introduction."

"I'm sorry. It sounds awful."

"It was. I've been on the point of meeting you a score of times, and there's always been some horrid fatality. Either you'd gone when I arrived, or I had to go before you arrived. I believe I've seen you — once."

"I don't remember."

"At Miss Bickersteth's. You were coming out as I was going in." He looked at his watch. "And *now* I ought to be catching a train."

"Don't catch it."

"I shan't. For I've got to tell you how much I admire your work. I'm not going to ask how you do it, for I don't suppose you know yourself."

"I don't."

"I'm not even going to ask myself. I simply accept the miracle."

"If it's miracles you want, look at George Tanqueray."

He said nothing. And now she thought of it, he had not looked at George Tanqueray. He had looked at nobody but her. It was the look of a man who had never known a moment's uncertainty as to the thing he wanted. It was a look that stuck.

"Why are n't you at his feet?" she said

"Because I'm not drawn — to my knees — by brutal strength and cold, diabolical lucidity."

"Oh," she cried, "you have n't read him."

"I've read all of him. And I prefer you."

"Me? You've spoilt it all. If you can't admire him, what is the use of your admiring me?"

"I see. You don't want me to admire you."

He said it with no emphasis, no emotion, as if he were indifferent as to what she wanted.

"No. I don't think I do."

"You see," he said, "you have a heart."

"Oh, if people would only leave my heart alone!"

"And Tanqueray, I believe, has a devil."

She turned on him.

"Give me George Tanqueray's devil!" She paused, considering him. "Why do you talk about my heart?"

"Because, if I may say so, it's what I like most in you."

"Anybody can like *that*."

"Can they?"

"Yes. For ten people who care for me there is n't one capable of caring for George Tanqueray."

"How very unfortunate for him."

"Unfortunate for me, you mean."

He smiled. He was not in the least offended. It was as if her perverse shafts never penetrated his superb solidity.

And yet he was not obtuse, not insensitive. He might fall, she judged, through pride, but not through vanity.

"I admit," said he, "that he is our greatest living novelist."

"Then," said she, "you are forgiven."

"And I may continue to adore your tenderness?"

"You may adore anything — after that admission."

He smiled again, like one satisfied, appeased.

"What," he said presently, "is Miss Lempriere's work like? Has she anything of your breadth, your solidity, your fire?"

"There's more fire in Nina Lempriere's little finger than in my whole body."



"Why do you talk about my heart?"

Brodrick took out his pocket-book and made a note of Nina.

"And the little lady? What does she do?"

"Little things. Charming, delicious, funny, pathetic things. Everything she does is like herself."

"I must put her down too." And he made another note of Laura.

They had turned on to the lawn. Their host was visible, gathering great bunches of roses for his guests.

"What a lovable person he is," said Brodrick.

"Is n't he?" said Jane.

They faced the house, the little house roofed with moss, walled with roses, where, thought Jane, poor Nicky nested like the nightingale he was n't and would never be.

"I wonder," said Brodrick, "how he gets the perfection, the peace, the finish of it, the little feminine touches, the flowers on the table——"

"Yes, Mr. Nicholson and his house always look as if they were expecting a lady."

"But," said Brodrick, "it's so pathetic, for the lady never comes."

"Perhaps if she did it would n't be so peaceful."

"Perhaps. But it must be sad for him—living alone like this."

"I don't know. I live alone and I'm not sad."

"You? You live alone?"

"Of course I do. So does Mr. Tanqueray."

"Tanqueray. He's a man, and it does n't matter. But you, a woman—— It's horrible."

He was almost animated.

"There's your friend, Miss Bickersteth. She lives alone."

"Miss Bickersteth—is Miss Bickersteth."

"There's Nina Lempriere."

"The fiery lady?" He paused, meditating. "Why do her people let her?"

"She has n't got any. Her people are all dead."

"How awful. And your small friend, Miss Gunning? Don't say she lives alone, too."

"She does n't. She lives with her father. He's worse than a family ——"

"Worse than a ——?" He stared aghast.

"Worse than a family of seven children."

"And that's a misfortune, is it?" He frowned.

"Yes, when you have to keep it — on nothing but what you earn by writing, and when it leaves you neither time nor space to write in."

"I see. She ought n't to have to do it."

"But she has, and it's killing her. She'd be better if she lived alone."

"Well — I don't know anything about Miss Gunning. But for you ——"

"You don't know anything about me."

"I do. I've seen you. And I stick to it. It's horrible."

"What's horrible?" said Miss Bickersteth, as they approached.

"Ask Mr. Brodrick."

But Brodrick, thus appealed to, drifted away towards Nicholson, murmuring something about that train he had to catch.

"What have you done to agitate him?" said Miss Bickersteth.

"You did n't throw cold water on his magazine, did you?"

"I should n't have known he had a magazine."

"What? Did n't he mention it?"

"Not to me."

"Then something is the matter with him." She added, after a thoughtful pause, "What did you think of him?"

"There's no doubt he's a very amiable, benevolent man. The sort of man who wants everybody to marry because he's married himself."

"But he is n't married."

"Well, he looks it. He looks as if he'd never been anything *but* married all his life."

"Anyhow," said Miss Bickersteth, "that's safe. Safer than not looking married when you are."

"Oh, he's safe enough," said Jane. As she spoke she was aware of Tanqueray standing at her side.

IX

THE day was over, and they were going back.

Their host insisted on accompanying them to the station. They had given him a day, and every moment of it, he declared solemnly, was precious.

They could hardly have spent it better than with Nicky in his perfect house, his perfect garden. And Nicky had been charming, with his humble ardour, his passion for a perfection that was not his.

The day, Miss Holland intimated, was his, Nicky's present, rather than theirs. He glowed. It had been glorious, anyhow, a perfect day. A day, Nicky said, that made him feel immortal.

He looked at Jane Holland and George Tanqueray, and they tried not to smile. Jane would have died rather than have hurt Nicky's feelings. It was not in her to spoil his perfect day. All the same, it had been their secret jest that Nicky *was* immortal. He would never end, never by any possibility disappear. As he stuck now, he always would stick. He was going with them to the station.

Sensitive to the least quiver of a lip, the young man's mortal part was stung with an exquisite sense of the becoming.

"If I feel it," said he, "what must *you* feel?"

"Oh, we!" they cried, and broke loose from his solemn and detaining eyes.

They walked on ahead, and Nicholson was left behind with Laura Gunning and Nina Lempriere. He consented, patiently and politely, to be thus outstripped. After all, the marvellous thing was that he should find himself on that road at all with Them. After all, he had had an hour alone with Him, in his garden, and five-and-twenty minutes by his watch with Her. It was enough if he could keep his divinities in sight, following the flutter of Miss Holland's veil.

Besides, she had asked him to talk to Nina and look after Laura. She was always asking him to be an angel, and look after somebody. Being an angel seemed somehow his doom. But he was sorry for Laura. They said she had cared for Tanqueray; and he could well believe it. He could believe in any woman caring for Him. He wondered how it had left her. A little defiant, he thought, but with a quiet, clear-eyed virginity. Determined, too. Nicholson had never seen so large an expression of determination on so small a face.

He always liked talking to Laura; but he shrank inexpressibly from approaching Nina, the woman with unquiet eyes and nervous gestures, and a walk that suggested the sweep of a winged thing to its end. A glance at Nina told him that wherever she was she could look after herself.

Morose, fearlessly disarrayed, and with it all a trifle haggard and forlorn, Nina Lempriere had the air of not belonging to them. She paused, she loitered, she swept tempestuously ahead, but none of her movements had the slightest reference to her companions. From time to time he glanced uncomfortably at Nina.

"Leave her," said Laura, "to herself."

"Do you think," he said, "she minds being left?"

"Not she. She likes it. You don't suppose she's thinking of us?"

"Dear me, no; but one likes to be polite."

"She'd so much rather you were sincere."

"I say, may n't I be both?"

"Oh yes, but you could n't always be with Nina. She makes you feel sometimes as if it was no use your existing."

"Do you think," he said, "she'll stand beside Jane Holland?"

"No. She may go farther."

"Go farther? How?"

"She's got a better chance."

"A better chance? I should n't have backed her chance against Miss Holland's."

"It is better. She does n't get so mixed up with people. If she *were* to ——"

He waited.

"She'd go with a rush, in one piece, and either die or come out of it all right. Whereas Jane ——"

He waited breathlessly.

"Jane would be torn to tatters, inch by inch."

Nicholson felt a curious constriction across his chest. His throat dried as he spoke again.

"What do you think would tear her most?"

"Oh, if she married."

"I thought you meant that."

"The thing is," said Laura, "not to marry." She said it meditatively and without reference to herself; but he gathered that, if reference had been made, she would, with still more dogged a determination, have kept her view.

He agreed with her, and pondered. Tanqueray had once said the very same thing to him, in talking about Jane. She ought not to marry. He, Tanqueray, was n't going to, not if he knew it. That was the view they all took. Not to marry.

He knew that they were under vows of poverty. Were they pledged to chastity and obedience, too? Obedience, immitigable, unrelenting? How wonderful they were, they and their achievements and renunciations, the things they did, and the things they let alone simply and as a matter of course, with their infallible instinct for the perfect. High, solitary priest and priestesses of a god diviner than desire. And She — he saw her more virgin, more perfect than they all.

"You think too then," the blameless youth continued, "that if Miss Holland — married it would injure her career?"

"Injure it? There would n't be any career left to injure."

Was it really so? He recorded, silently, his own determination to remember that. It had for him, also, the consecration of a vow.

A thought struck him. Perhaps Laura, perhaps Tanqueray, had divined him and were endeavouring in kindness to take

from him the poison of a preposterous hope. He preferred, however, not to explain them or the situation or himself thus. He was, with all possible sublimity, renouncing Jane.

Another thought struck him. It struck him hard, with the shock almost of blasphemy. It broke into speech.

“Not,” he said, “if she were to marry Him?”

Laura was silent, and he wondered.

Why not? After all it was natural. She matched him. The thing was inevitable, and it was fitting. So supremely fitting was it that he could not very well complain. He could give her up to George Tanqueray.

X

JANE HOLLAND and Tanqueray had left the others some considerable way behind. It was possible, they agreed, to have too much of Nicky, though he did adore them.

The wide high road stood up before them, climbing the ridge, to drop down into Wendover. A white road, between grass borders and hedgerows, their green powdered white with the dust of it. Over all, the pallor of the first white hour of twilight.

For a moment, a blessed pause in the traffic, they were alone; twilight and the road were theirs.

The two bore themselves with a certain physical audacity, a swinging challenge to fatigue. He, in his well-knit youth, walked with the step of some fine, untamed animal. She, at his side, kept the wild pace he set with a smooth motion of her own. She carried, high and processionally, her trophy, flowers from their host's garden, wild parsley of her own gathering, and green fans of beech and oak. As she went, the branches swayed with the swinging of her body. A light wind woke on the hill and played with her. Her long veil, grey-blue and transparent, falling from her head to her shoulders, flew and drifted about her, now clinging to her neck, her breasts, now fluttering itself free.

He looked at her, and thought that if Gisborne, R.A., had n't been an idiot, he would have painted her, not sitting, but like that. Protected by the charm of Rose, there was no more terror for him in any charm of Jane's. He could afford to show his approval, to admit that, even as a woman, she had points. He could afford, being extremely happy himself, to make Jane happy too.

So sheltered, so protected was he that it did not strike him that Jane was utterly defenceless and exposed.

"Yes," he said, "it's been a day."

"Has n't it?"

She saw him sustained by some inward ecstasy. The coming joy, the joy of his wedding-day, was upon him; the light of it was in his eyes as he looked at her, the tenderness of it in his voice as he spoke to her again.

"Have you liked it as much as you used to like our other days?"

"Oh more, far more." Then, remembering how those other days had been indeed theirs and nobody else's, she added, "In spite of poor Nicky."

It was at this moment that he realized that he would have to tell her about Rose; also that he would be hanged if he knew how to. She had been manifestly unhappy when he last saw her. Now he saw, not only that she was happy, but that he was responsible for her happiness. This was worse than anything he had yet imagined. It gave him his first definite feeling of treachery toward Jane.

Her reference to Nicky came like a reprieve. How was it, he said, that they were let in for him? Or rather, why had they ever let him in?

"It was you, Jane, who did it."

"No, George; it was you. You introduced him."

He owned it. "I did it because I hoped you'd fall in love with him."

She saw that there was a devil in him that still longed to torment her.

"That," said she, "would have been very bad for Nicky."

"Yes. But it would have been very good for you."

She had her moment of torment; then she recovered.

"I thought," said she, "that was the one thing I was not to do."

"You're not to do it seriously. But you could n't fall in love with Nicky seriously. Could you? Could anybody?"

"Why are you so unkind to Nicky?"

"Because he's so ungovernably a man of letters."

"He is n't. He only thinks he is."

"He thinks he's Shelley, because his father's a squire."

"That saves him. No man of letters, if he tried all night, could think anything so deliciously absurd. Don't you wish *you* could feel like that!"

He rose to it, his very excitement kindling his intellectual flame.

"To feel myself an immortal, a blessed god!"

They played together, profanely, with the idea that Nicky was after all divine.

"Such a tragic little god," said Jane, with a pitiful mouth, "a little god without a single apostle or a prophet — nobody," she wailed, "to spread the knowledge of him."

"I say — *we* 'll build an altar on Wendover, to Nicky as the Unknown God."

"He won't like that, our calling him unknown."

"Let's call him the Unapparent — the Undeveloped. He *is* the Undeveloped."

"In one aspect. In another he's a finished poem, an incarnate lyric —"

"An ode to immortality on legs —"

"Nicky has n't any legs. He's a breath — a perpetual aspiration."

"Oh, at aspiring he beats Shelley into apoplexy."

"He stands for the imperishable illusion —"

"The stupendous hope —"

"And, after all, he adores *you*."

"And nobody else does," said Tanqueray.

"That's Nicky's achievement. He *does* see what you are. It's his little claim to immortality. Just think, George, when Nicky dies and goes to heaven he'll turn up at the gates of the poets' paradise, and they'll let him in on the strength of that. The angel of the singing stars will come up to him and say, 'Nicky, you sing abominably, but you can see. You saw George Tanqueray when nobody else could. Your sonnets and your ballads are forgiven you; and we've got a nice place for you, Nicky, near Keats and Shelley.' Because it would n't be heaven for Nicky if he was n't near them."

"How about *them*, though?"

"Oh, up in heaven you won't see anything of Nicky except his heart."

"I suppose he'll be stuck somewhere near you, too. It won't be heaven for him if he is n't. The first thing he'll ask is, 'Where's Jane?'"

"And then they'll break it to him very gently — 'Jane's in the other place, Nicky, where Mr. Tanqueray is. We had to send her down, because if she was n't there it would n't be hell for Mr. Tanqueray.'"

"But why am *I* down there?"

"Because you did n't see what Nicky was."

"If you don't take care, Jinny, he'll 'have' you like the rest. You're laying up sorrow for yourself in the day when Nicky publishes his poems."

"It's you he'll turn to."

"No. I'm not celebrated," said he grimly. "There, do you see the full horror of it?"

"I do," she moaned.

Tanqueray's devil came back to him.

"Do you think he'll fall in love with Laura?"

"No, I don't." She said it coolly, though his gaze was upon her, and they were both of them aware of Nicky's high infatuation.

"Why not?" he said lightly.

"Because Nicky'll never be in love with any woman as she is; and nobody could be in love with Laura as she is n't."

She faced him in her courage. He might take it, if he liked, that she knew Nicky was in love with her as she was not; that she knew Tanqueray would never, like Nicky, see her as she was not, to be in love with that.

"Oh, you're too subtle," he said. But he understood her subtlety.

He must tell her about Rose. Before the others could come up with them he must tell her. And then he must tell Nicky.

"Jane," he said, "will you forgive me for never coming to see you? I simply could n't come."

"I know, George, I know."

"You don't. You don't know what I felt like."

"Perhaps not. And yet, I think, you might ——"

But what she thought he might have done she would not tell him.

"At any rate," said he, "you'll let me come and see you now? Often; I want to come often."

He meant to tell her that his marriage was to make no difference.

"Come as often as you want. Come as often as you used to."

"Was it so very often?"

"Not too often."

"I say, those were glorious times we had. We'll have them again, Jinny. There are things we've got to talk about. Things we've got to do. Why, we're hardly beginning."

"Do you remember saying, 'When you've made yourself an absolutely clear medium, then you can begin'?"

"I remember."

He was content now to join her in singing the duet of remembrance.

She dismissed herself. "What have *you* been doing?"

"Not much. It looks as if I couldn't do things without you."

A look of heavenly happiness came upon her face, and passed.

"That isn't so, George. There never was anybody less dependent on other people. That's why nothing has ever stopped you. Nothing ever will. Whereas—you're right about me. Anything might stop me."

"Could *I* stop you?"

Not for his life could he have told what made him ask her that question, whether an insane impulse, or a purely intellectual desire to complete his knowledge of her, to know how deep she had gone in and what his power was, whether he could, indeed, "stop" her.

"You?" she said, and her voice had a long, profound and passionate vibration. He had not dreamed that such a tone could have been wrung from Jane.

Her eyes met his. Steady they were and deep, under their level brows; but in them, too, was that sudden, unexpected quality. Something in her startled him with its intensity.

Her voice, her look, had made it impossible for him to tell her about Rose. It was not the moment.

"I did n't know she was like that," he thought.

No, he had never known until now what Jane was; never seen until now that the gods in giving her genius had given her one passion the more, to complicate her, to increase tenfold her interest and her charm.

And, with the charm of Rose upon him, he could not tell whether, if he had known, it would have made any difference. All he knew or cared to know was that he was going to marry Rose the day after to-morrow.

He would have to ask Nicky to let him go back with him and stay the night. Then he could tell him. And he could get out of telling Jane. He liked teasing and tormenting her, but he did not want to stab her. Still less did he want to stand by with the steel in his hand and see her bleed.

He must get away from Jane.

XI

ON the morning after Wendover Jane woke, bright-eyed and flushed with dreams. Last night a folding splendour had hung over her till she slept. It passed into her dreams, and joy woke her.

She sat up and swung her slender limbs over the bed-side, and was caught, agreeably, by her likeness in the long glass of the wardrobe.

She went to it and stood there, looking at herself. For the last three months she had been afraid to face the woman in the glass. Sometimes she had had to turn her head another way when she passed her. Every day the woman in the glass grew more repulsively powerful and sombre, more dreadfully like that portrait which George hated. She knew he could n't stand her when she looked like that. Looking like that, and George's inability to stand her, and the celebrity that made her so absurd, she put it all down to the peculiar malice and mischief of the thing that had been, as she said, "tacked on" to her, the thing they called her Genius.

And now she did not look like *that* in the very least. She looked, to her amazement, like any other woman.

Nobody had ever said that Jane was handsome. She had n't one straight feature, except her eyebrows which were too straight. She was n't pretty, either. There was something about her too large and dominating for that. She had that baffling and provoking modern beauty which secures its effect by some queer-ness, some vividness of accent, and triumphs by some ugliness subdued. It was part of her queerness that she had the square brows, the wide mouth, the large, innocent muzzle of a deer, and a neck that carried her head high. With a queerness amounting to perversity some gentle, fawn-like, ruminant

woman had borne her. And, queerer still, her genius had rushed in and seized upon that body, that it might draw wild nature into it through her woodland, pastoral blood. And for the blood it took it had given her back fire.

Latterly, owing to Tanqueray's behaviour, whenever Jane looked in the glass, it had been the element of queerness and ugliness that she had seen. She had felt herself cruelly despoiled, disinherited of the splendours and powers of her sex. And here she was, looking, as she modestly put it, like any other woman. Any one of the unknown multitude whom lately, in prophetic agony, she had seen surrounding Tanqueray; women dowered, not with the disastrous gift of genius, but with the secret charm and wonder of mere womanhood. One of these (she had always reckoned with the possibility), one of these conceivably might at any moment, and inevitably would when her moment came, secure and conquer Tanqueray. She had been afraid, even in vision, to measure her power with theirs.

But now, standing there in the long nightgown that made her so straight and tall, with arms raised, holding up the thick mass of her hair, her body bent a little backwards from the waist, showing it for the slender and supple thing it was, seeing herself so incredibly feminine and so alive, she defied any one to tell the difference. If any difference there were it was not in her body, neither was it in her face. That was the face which had looked at Tanqueray last night; the face which he had called up to meet that strange excitement and that tenderness of his. Her body was the body of a woman created in a day and a night by joy for its own wooing.

This glorious person was a marvel to itself. It was so incomprehensibly, so superlatively happy. Its eyes, its mouth, its hands and feet were happy. It was happy inside and out and all over. It had developed a perfectly preposterous capacity for enjoyment. It found pleasure in bathing itself, in dressing itself, in brushing its hair. And its very hair, when it had done with it, looked happy.

It was at its happiest at ten o'clock, when Jane sat down

to write a letter to Tanqueray. The letter had to be written. For yesterday Nina Lempriere had asked her to supper in her rooms on Sunday, and she was to bring George Tanqueray. If, said Nina, she could get him.

Sunday was the seventeenth. This was Wednesday, the thirteenth. She would hear from Tanqueray to-night or to-morrow at the latest. And there would be only four days to get through till Sunday.

To-night and to-morrow went, and Tanqueray did not write. Jane's heart began to ache with an intolerable anxiety.

It was on Saturday night that the letter came.

"Dear Jinny," it said. "It was nice of Nina to ask me to supper. I'm sorry I can't come. I got married yesterday.
"Yrs., G. T.

"P.S. — Nicky saw me through."

Not a word about his wife.

At first the omission did not strike her as significant. It was so like Tanqueray, to fling you the bare body of a fact while he cherished the secret soul of it himself. He must have wondered how she would take it.

She took it as she would have taken a telegram from a stranger, telling her that Tanqueray was dead. She took it, as she would have taken the stranger's telegram, standing very stiff and very still. She faced, as it were, an invisible crowd of such strangers, ignorant of the intimacy of her loss, not recognizing her right to suffer, people whose presence constrained her to all the observances of decency.

She crushed the note in her hand vindictively, as she would have crushed that telegram; she pushed it from her, hating the thing that had made her suffer. Then she drew it to her again; she smoothed it; she examined it, as she might have examined the telegram, to verify the hour and the place of the decease, to establish the fact which seemed incredible.

Verification brought the first live pangs that stabbed her.

She was aware of the existence of the woman. There had been a woman all the time. But she could n't realize her. She only knew that she meant finality, separation.

An hour passed. She went to bed. Her footsteps and her movements in undressing were hushed and slow. She was still like some one who knows that there has been a death in the house and that the body lies in the next room. Stretched in her bed, turning her face to the wall to hide herself, she had that sense of awful contact and of separation, of there being only a wall between the living and the dead.

The best thing that could have happened to her would have been to lie awake all night, and let her heart and brain hammer as they would, till they hammered her to stupefaction. Unfortunately, towards morning she fell into a sound sleep.

She woke from it with nerves re-charged to the point of torture and a brain intolerably acute. She saw now all the vivid, poignant things which last night she had overlooked. She realized the woman. She divined her secret, her significance, all that she stood for and all that she portended. In the light of that woman (for she spread round her an unbearable illumination) Jane saw transparently what *she* had been to Tanqueray. She had had no power and no splendour for him of her own. But she had been the reflection of the woman's splendour and her power. So much so that, when he looked at her as he had looked the other evening, he, George Tanqueray, had grown tender as if in the presence of the other. He had suffered a sentimental, a sensuous hallucination, and had made her suffer.

But never, never for a moment had he cared for her, or seen in her any power or splendour of her own.

She wondered why he had not told her about that woman then. It had been just two days before he married her. Perhaps it had been only his shyness, or, more likely, his perversity.

But he had said nothing about her now. He had not said, as men say so fatuously in this circumstance, that he believed

they would like each other and that he hoped they would be friends.

It was borne in on her that he had said nothing because he knew it was the end. There were no fatuous beliefs and hopes in Tanqueray. And if there was perversity, there was also an incorruptible, an almost violent honesty. His honesty was, as it were, part of his perversity.

He was not going to keep up any absurd pretences, to let her imagine for one moment that it was not the end. It was to mean, not only that Tanqueray would no longer exist for her, but that she would no longer exist for Tanqueray. In her attitude to him, there had always been, though Tanqueray did not know it, an immense simplicity and humbleness. She felt herself wiped out by this woman who wore for him (she saw her wearing) all the powers and all the splendours. Tanqueray's wife must make an end of her and of everything. There was nothing, not the smallest, most pitiful, cast-up fragment that she could save from the wreck. A simple, ordinary friendship might have survived it, but not theirs. There had been in it a disastrous though vague element of excess. She could not see it continuing in the face of Tanqueray's wife. As for enlarging it so as to embrace Tanqueray's wife as well as Tanqueray, Jane simply could n't. There was something virile in her that forbade it. She could no more have taken Tanqueray's wife into her heart than Tanqueray, if their cases had been reversed, could have taken into his Jane's husband. She might have expected Tanqueray to meet her husband, to shake hands with him, to dine with him, but not to feel or to profess affection for him. So Tanqueray would probably expect her to call upon his wife, to receive her, to dine with her, perhaps, but it would end there.

It would end there, in hand-shakings and in frigid ceremony, this friendship to which Tanqueray had lent himself with a precipitance that resembled passion and a fervour that suggested fire.

Looking back, she wondered at what moment the real thing

had begun. She was certain that two months ago, on that evening in May after he had dined with her, the moment, which was his moment, had been hers. She had been divided from him by no more than a hair's-breadth. And she had let him go for a scruple finer than a hair.

And yet it seemed to her that her scruple had not really counted. It might have worked, somehow, at the moment; but she could not think of it as containing all the calamitous weight of destiny. Her failure (it was so pre-eminently *her* failure) came of feeling and of understanding at every moment far too much. It came of having eyes at the back of your head and nerves that extended, prodigiously, beyond the confines of your body. It was as if she understood with her body and felt with her brain, passion and insight in her running disastrously together.

It came back to her that Tanqueray had always regarded her with interest and uncertainty, as if he had wondered whether she were really like other women. In his moment he had searched her for their secret, and her scruple had worked so far that he judged her lacking in the instinct of response.

Her heart, of course, he must have heard. It had positively screamed at him. But her heart was not what had concerned him at any moment. She remembered how she had said to him that night, "May n't I be a woman?" and he had answered her brutally. What *had* concerned him was her genius. If there had been twenty women in her he would have made her sacrifice them all to that. He had cared for it to the point of tenderness, of passion. She had scores of his letters in a drawer, there; love-letters written to her genius. She knew one of them, the last, by heart. It was written at Hampstead.

"Jinny," it had said, "I'm on my knees, with my hat off, at your feet. I'm in the dust, Jinny, kissing your feet. Shivers of exquisite adoration are going up and down my spine. Do you know what you've done to me, you unspeakably divine person? I've worn out the knees, the knees of my trousers; I've got dust in my hair, Jinny, kissing your feet."

That letter (there was a great deal more of it) had tided

her over Tanqueray's worst absence; it had carried her on, so to speak, to Wendover. As she thought of it her heart was filled with hatred and jealousy of her genius.

It was odd, but she had no jealousy and no hatred for Tanqueray's wife.

She hated and was jealous of her genius, not only because it had forced Tanqueray to care for it, but because, being the thing that had made her different from other women, it had kept Tanqueray from caring about her.

And she had got to live alone with it.

Her solitude had become unbearable. The room was unbearable; it was so pervaded, so dominated by her genius and by Tanqueray. Most of all by Tanqueray. There were things in it which he had given to her, things which she had given to him, as it were; a cup he drank out of, a tray he used for his cigar-ash; things which would remain vivid for ever with the illusion of his presence. She could not bear to see them about. She suffered in all ways, secretly, as if Tanqueray were dead.

A bell rang. It was four o'clock. Somebody was calling.

As to one preoccupied with a bereavement, it seemed to her incredible that anybody *could* call so soon. She was then reminded that she had a large acquaintance who would be interested in seeing how she took it. She had got to meet all these people as if nothing had happened. She remembered now that she had promised Caroline Bickersteth to go to tea with her to-day. If she wanted to present an appearance of nothing having happened, she could n't do better than go to Caro's for tea. Caro expected her and would draw conclusions from her absence.

So might her caller if she declared herself not at home.

It was Nicky, come, he said, to know if she were going to Miss Bickersteth's, and if he might have the pleasure of taking her there. That was all he cared to go for, the pleasure of taking her.

Jane had never thought of Nicky being there. He was a barrister and he had chambers, charming chambers, in the

Temple, where he gave little tea-parties and (less frequently) looked up little cases. But on Sundays he was always a little poet down at Wendover.

They need n't start at once, he said, almost as if he knew that Jane was dreading it. He sat and talked; he talked straight on end; talked, not literature, but humble, innocent banalities, so unlike Nicky who cared for nothing that had not the literary taint.

It was a sign of supreme embarrassment, the only one he gave. He did not mention Tanqueray, and for a moment she wondered if he had heard. Then she remembered. Of course, it was Nicky who had seen Tanqueray through.

Nicky was crowning his unlikelihood by refraining from the slightest allusion to the event. He was, she saw with dreadful lucidity, afraid of hurting her. And yet, he was (in his exquisite delicacy) behaving as if nothing had happened. They were going together to Miss Bickersteth's as if nothing had happened. His manner suggested that they were moving together in a world where nothing could happen; a world of delightful and amicable superficialities. She was not to be afraid of him; he was, as it were, looking another way; he was n't even aware of any depths. The sheer beauty and gentleness of him showed her that he had seen and understood thoroughly what depths there were.

It was her certainty of Nicky's vision that drove her to the supreme act of courage.

"Why aren't we talking," she said, "about George Tanqueray?"

Nicky blushed in a violent distress. Even so, in the house of mourning, he would have blushed at some sudden, unsoftened reference to the deceased.

"I did n't know," he said, "whether he had told you."

"Why should n't he?"

Poor Nicky, she had made him blunder, so upset was he by the spectacle of her desperate pluck. He really *was* like a person calling after a bereavement. He had called on account of it, and yet it was the last thing he was going to talk about.

He had come, not to condole, but to see if there was any way in which he could be of use.

"Well," said Nicky, "he seemed to have kept it so carefully from all his friends ——"

"He told *you* —— Why, you were there, were n't you?"

It was as if she had said, "You were there — you saw him die."

"Yes." Nicky's face expressed a tender relief. If she could talk about it —— "But it was only at the last minute."

"I wonder," said she, "why he did n't tell us."

"Well, you know, I think it was because she — the lady ——"

He hesitated. He knew what would hurt most; and he shrank almost visibly from mentioning Her.

"Yes — you've forgotten the lady."

She smiled, and he took courage. "There it is. The lady, you see, is n't altogether a lady."

"Oh, Nicky ——"

He did not look at her. He seemed to be a partaker in what he felt to be her suffering and Tanqueray's shame.

"Has he known her long?" she said.

"About two months."

She was right then. It had been since that night. It had been her own doing. She had driven him to her.

"Since he went to Hampstead then?"

"Yes."

"Who was she?"

"His landlady's daughter, I think, or a niece. She waited on him and — she nursed him when he was ill."

Jane drew in her breath with an almost audible sound. Nicky had sunk into his chair in his attitude of vicarious, shamefaced misery.

It made her rally. "Nicky," she said, "why do you look like that? I don't think it's nice of you to sit there, giving him away by making gloomy faces, in a chair. Why should n't he marry his landlady's daughter if he likes? You ought to stand up for him and say she's charming. She is. She must be; or he would n't have done it."

"He ought not to have done it."

"But he has. It had to happen. Nothing else could have happened."

"You think so? It seems to me the most unpredestined, the most horribly, fantastically fortuitous occurrence."

"It was what he wanted. Would n't you have given him what he wanted?"

"No," said Nicky, "not if it was n't good for him."

"Oh, Nicky, how do you know what's good for him? You're not George Tanqueray."

"No. If I were I'd have ——" He stopped. His passion, growing suddenly, recklessly, had brought him to the verge of the depth they were trying to avoid.

"If you were," said she, with amazing gaiety, "you'd have married this lady who isn't a lady. And then where would you have been?"

"Where indeed?" said Nicky bitterly.

Jane's face, so gay, became suddenly tragic. She looked away, staring steadily, dumbly, at something that she saw. Then he knew that he had raised a vision of the abyss, and of Tanqueray, their Tanqueray, sinking in it. He must keep her from contemplating that, or she would betray herself, she would break down.

He searched his heart for some consoling inspiration, and found none. It was his head which suggested that irrelevance was best.

"When," said he, by way of being irrelevant, "are you going to give us another big book?"

"I don't know," she said. "Never, I think."

He looked up. Her eyes shone perilously over trembling pools of tears. He had not been irrelevant at all.

"You don't *think* anything of the sort," he said, with a sharp tenderness.

"No. I feel it. There isn't another book in me. I'm done for, Nicky."

Her tears were hanging now on the curve of her eyelashes. They shook and fell.

She sat there silent, fronting the abyss. Nicky was horrified and looked it. If that was how she took it——

“You’ve overworked yourself. That’s all,” he said presently.

“Yes. That’s all.”

She rose. “Nicky,” she said, “it’s half-past four. If we’re going we must go.”

“Are you sure you want to?”

“Of course I want to.” She said it in a tone that for Nicky pointed to another blunder.

“I only thought,” said he simply, “it might bore you.”

XII

MISS BICKERSTETH'S house was round the corner. So small a house that a front room and a back room thrown together hardly gave Caro space enough for tea-parties. But as the back room formed a recess, what space she had was admirably adapted for the discreet arrangement of conversation in groups. Its drawback was that persons in the recess remained unaware of those who entered by the door of the front room, until they were actually upon them.

Through that door, opened gently by the little servant, Miss Bickersteth, in the recess, was heard inquiring with some excitement, "Can't either of you tell me who she is?"

Only Nina and Laura were with her. Jane knew from their abrupt silence, as she entered, that they had been discussing George Tanqueray's marriage. She gathered that they had only just begun. There was nothing for it but to invite them to go on, to behave in all things as if nothing had happened, or could happen to her.

"Please don't stop," she said, "it sounds exciting."

"It is. But Mr. Nicholson disapproves of scandal," said Caro, not without address.

"He's been talking nothing else to me," said Jane.

"Yes, but his scandal and our scandal ——"

"Yours is n't in it with his. He's seen her."

Three faces turned to Nicholson's, as if it held for them the reflection of his vision. Miss Bickersteth's face was flushed with embarrassment that struggled with curiosity; Nina's was almost fierce in its sombre, haggard intensity; Laura's, in its stillness, had an appealing anxiety, an innocent distress. It was shadowless and unashamed; it expressed a trouble that had in it no taint of self.

Nicky met them with an admirable air of light-heartedness. "Don't look at me," he said. "I can't tell you anything."

"But — you've seen her," said Miss Bickersteth, seating herself at her tea-table.

"I've seen her, but I don't know her," he said stiffly.

"She does n't seem to have impressed him favourably," remarked Miss Bickersteth to the world in general.

Nicky brought tea to Jane, who opened her eyes at him in deprecation of his alarming reticence. It was as if she had said, "Oh, Nicky — to please me — won't you say nice things about her?"

He understood. "Miss Holland would like me to tell you that she is charming."

"Do you know her, Jinny?" It was Laura who spoke.

"No, dear. But I know George Tanqueray.

"As for Nicky," she went on, with high daring, "you must n't mind what he says. He would n't think any mortal woman good enough for George."

Nicky's soul smiled all to itself invisibly as it admired her.

"I see," said Miss Bickersteth. "The woman is n't good enough. I hope she's good."

"Oh — good. Good as they make them."

"He knows," said Jane, "more than he lets out."

She withdrew into the corner where little Laura sat, while Miss Bickersteth put her witness under severe cross-examination.

"Is it," she said, "the masterpiece of folly?"

"It looks like it. Only, she *is* good."

"Good, but impossible."

"Im-possible."

"Do you mean — for Him?"

"I mean in herself. Utterly impossible."

"But inevitable?"

"Not in the least, to judge by what I saw."

"Then," said Miss Bickersteth, "how *did* it happen?"

"I don't know," said Nicky, "how it happened."

There was a long pause. Miss Bickersteth seemed almost to retire from ground that was becoming perilous.

"You may as well tell them," said Jane, "what you do know."

"I have," said poor Nicky.

"You have n't told us who she is," said Nina.

"She is Mrs. George Tanqueray. She was, I believe, a very humble person. The daughter — no — I think he said the niece — of his landlord."

"Uneducated?" said Miss Bickersteth.

"Absolutely."

"Common?"

He hesitated and Jane prompted. "No, Nicky."

"Don't tamper," said Miss Bickersteth, "with my witness. Uncommon?"

"Not in the least."

"Any aitches?"

"I decline," said Nicky, "to answer any more questions."

"Never mind. You've told us quite enough. I'm disgusted with Mr. Tanqueray."

"But why?" said Jane imperturbably.

"Why? When one thinks of the women, the perfectly adorable women he might have married — if he'd only waited. And he goes and does this."

"He knows his own business best," said Jane.

"A man's marriage is not his business."

"What is it, then?"

Miss Bickersteth was at a loss for once, and Laura helped her. "It's his pleasure, is n't it?"

"He'd no right to take his pleasure this way."

Jane raised her head.

"He had. A perfect right."

"To throw himself away? My dear — on a little servant-girl without an aitch in her?"

"On anybody he pleases."

"Can you imagine George Tanqueray," said Nina, "throwing himself away on anybody?"

"I can — easily," said Nicholson.

"Whatever he throws away," said Nina, "it won't be himself."

"My dear Nina, look at him," said Miss Bickersteth. "He's done for himself — socially, at any rate."

"Not he. It's men like George Tanqueray who can afford to do these things. Do you suppose anybody who cares for him will care a rap whom he marries?"

"I care," said Nicky. "I care immensely."

"You need n't. Marriage is not — it really is not — the fearfully important thing you think it."

Nicholson looked at his boots, his perfect boots.

"It's *the* most important act of a man's life," he said.

"An ordinary man's — a curate's — a grocer's. And for Tanqueray — for any one who creates —"

"For any one who creates," said Nina, "nothing's important outside his blessed creation."

"And this lady, I imagine," said Miss Bickersteth, "will be very much outside it."

Nicky raised his dark eyes and gazed upon them. "Good heavens! But a man wants a woman to inspire him."

"George does n't," said Jane. "You may trust him to inspire himself."

"You may," said Nina. "In six months it won't matter whether George is married or not. At least, not to George."

She rose, turning on Nicky as if something in his ineffectual presence maddened her. "Do you suppose," she said, "that woman counts? No woman counts with men like George Tanqueray."

"She can hold you back," said Nicky.

"You think so? You haven't got a hundred horse-power genius pulling you along. When he's off, fifty women hanging on to him could n't hold him back."

She smiled. "You don't know him. The first time that wife of his gets in his way he'll shove her out of it. If she does it again he'll knock her down and trample her under his feet."

Her smile, more than ever ironic, lashed Nicky's shocked recoil.

"Creators are a brutal crew, Mr. Nicholson. We're all the same. You need n't be sorry for us."

She looked, over Nicky's head as it were, at Jane and Laura. It was as if with a sweep of her stormy wing she gathered them, George Tanqueray and Jane and Laura, into the spaces where they ran the superb course of the creators.

The movement struck Arnott Nicholson aside into his place among the multitudes of the uncreative. Who was he to judge George Tanqueray? If *she* arraigned him she had a right to. She was of his race, his kind. She could see through Nicky as if he had been an innocent pane of glass. And at the moment Nicky's soul with its chivalry and delicacy enraged her. Caroline Bickersteth enraged her, everybody enraged her except Jane and little Laura.

She stood beside Jane, who had risen and was about to say good-bye.

Caro would have kept them with her distressed, emphatic "*Must* you go?" She was expecting, she said, Mr. Brodrick.

Jane was not interested in Mr. Brodrick. She could not stay and did not, and, going, she took Nina with her.

Laura would have followed, but Miss Bickersteth held her with a hand upon her arm. Nicholson left them, though Laura's eyes almost implored him not to go.

"My dear," said Miss Bickersteth. "Tell me. Have you any idea how much she cares for him?"

"She?"

"Jane."

"You've no reason to suppose she cares."

"Do you think he cared in the very least for her?"

"I think he may have — without knowing it."

"My dear, there's nothing that man doesn't know. He knows, for instance, all about *us*."

"Us?"

"You and I. We've both of us been there. And Nina."

"How *do* you know?"

"She was flagrant!"

"Flagrant?"

"Flagrant is n't the word for it. She was flamboyant, magnificent, superb!"

"You forget she's my friend," said little Laura.

"She's mine. I'm not traducing her. Look at George Tanqueray. I defy any woman not to care for him. It's nothing to be ashamed of — like an infatuation for a stock-broker who has no use for you. It's — it's your apprenticeship at the hands of the master."

XIII

NINA inhabited a third floor in a terrace off the Strand, overlooking the river. You approached it by secret, tortuous ways that made you wonder.

In a small backroom, for an unspeakable half-hour, the two women had sat over the table facing each other, with Tanqueray's empty place between them. There had been moments when their sense of his ironic, immaterial presence had struck them dumb. It was as if this were the final, consummate stroke of the diabolic master. It had been as impossible to talk about him as if he had been sitting there and had overheard them.

They left him behind them in the other room, a room where there was no evidence of Tanqueray's ever having been. The place was incontestably and inalterably Nina's. There were things in it cared for by Nina with a superstitious tenderness, portraits, miniatures, relics guarded, as it were, in shrines. And in their company were things that Nina had worn out and done with; things overturned, crushed, flung from her in a fury of rejection; things on which Nina had inflicted personal violence, provoked, you felt, by their too long and intimate association with her; signs everywhere of the pace at which she went through things. It was as if Nina had torn off shreds, fringes, whole layers of herself and left them there. You inferred behind her a long, half-savage ancestry of the open air. There were antlers about and the skins of animals. A hunting-crop hung by the chimney-piece. Foils, fishing-rods, golf-clubs staggered together in a corner. Nina herself, long-limbed, tawny, aquiline, had the look of wild and nervous adolescence prisoned within walls.

Beyond this confusion and disorder, her windows opened wide to London, to the constellated fires, the grey enchantment and silence of the river.

It was Nina who began it. Leaning back in a very low chair, with her legs crossed and her arms flung wide, a position almost insolent in its ease, she talked.

"Jinny," she said, "have you any idea how it happened?"

Jane made a sound of negation that was almost inaudible, and wholly inarticulate.

Nina pondered. "I believe," she said presently, "you *do* know." She paused on that a moment. "It need n't have happened," she said. "It would n't if you'd shown him that you cared."

Jane looked at her then. "I did show him," she said. "That's how it happened."

"It could n't. Not that way."

"It did. I waked him up. I made him restless, I made him want things. But there was nothing — nothing ——"

"You forget. I've seen him with you. What's more, I've seen him without you."

"Ah, but it was n't *that*. Not for a moment. It could never have been *that*."

"You could have made it that. You could have made it anything you liked. Jinny! If I'd been as sure of him as you were, I'd never have let him go. I'd have held on ——"

Her hands' tense clutch on the arm of her chair showed how she would have held on.

"You see," said Jinny, "I was never sure of him."

A silence fell between them.

"You were in it," said Nina, troubling the silence. "It must — it must have been something you did to him."

"Or something I did n't do."

"Yes. Something you did n't do. You did n't know how."

Jane could have jumped at this sudden echo of her thought.

"And *she* did," said Nina.

She got up and leaned against the chimney-piece, looking down on Jane. "Poor Jinny," she said. "How I hated you three years ago."

Jane remembered. It was just three years since Nina had gone away without saying a word and hidden herself among

the mountains where she was born. In her isolation she had conceived and brought forth her "Tales of the Marches." And a year ago she had come back to them, the Nina whom they knew.

"You can't hate me now," Jane said.

"I believe I would if you had been sure of him. But I don't hate you. I don't even hate her."

"Why should you?"

"Why should I? When I don't believe she's sure of him, either. She's called out the little temporary animal or the devil in him. That's what she's married. It won't last."

"No, Nina. Nicky said she was good."

"It's wonderful how good women manage these things."

"Not when they're absolutely simple."

"How do you know she's simple?"

"Oh — because I'm not."

"Simplicity," said Nina, "would only give her more rope."

"Nina — there's one thing Nicky didn't tell us. He never let on that she was pretty. I suppose he thought that was more than we could bear."

"How do you know she's pretty?"

"That's how I see her. Very pretty, very soft and tender. Shy at first, and then very gently, very innocently letting herself go. And always rather sensuous and clinging."

"Poor idiot — she's done for if she clings. I'm not sorry for George, Jinny; I'm sorry for the woman. He'll lay her flat on the floor and wipe his boots on her."

Jane shrank back. "Nina," she said, "you loved him. And yet — you can tear him to pieces."

"You think I'm a beast, do you?"

"Yes. When you tear him — and before people, too."

She shrank a little further. Nina was now sitting on the floor with her back against Jane's knees.

"It's all very well for you," she said. "He wanted to care for you. He only wanted me — to care. That's what he is. He makes you care, he makes you show it, he drives you on and on. He gives nothing; he takes nothing. But he lets you strip

yourself bare; he lets you bring him the soul out of your body, and then he turns round and treats you as if you were his cast-off mistress."

She laid her head back on Jane's knee, so that Jane saw her face foreshortened and, as it were, distorted.

"If I had been — if I'd been like any other woman, good or bad, he'd have been different."

Jane started at this sudden voice of her own thought.

It was as if some inscrutable, incredible portion of herself, some dark and fierce and sensual thing lay there at her feet. It was not incredible or inscrutable to itself. It was indeed splendidly unashamed. It gloried in itself and in its suffering. It lived on its own torture, violent and exalted; Jane could hardly bear its nearness and its utterance. But she was sorry for it. She hated to see it suffer.

It raised its head.

"Does n't it look, Jinny, as if genius were the biggest curse a woman can be saddled with? It's giving you another sex inside you, and a stronger one, to plague you. When we want a thing we can't sit still like a woman and wait till it comes to us, or does n't come. We go after it like a man; and if we can't get it peaceably we fight for it, as a man fights when he is n't a coward or a fool. And because we fight we're done for. And then, when we're down, the woman in us turns and rends us. But if we got what we wanted we'd be just like any other woman. As long," she added, "as we wanted it."

She got up and leaned against the chimney-piece looking down, rather like a man, on Jane.

"It's borne in on me," she said, "that the woman in us is n't meant to matter. She's simply the victim of the Will-to-do-things. It puts the bit into our mouths and drives us the way we must go. It's like a whip laid across our shoulders whenever we turn aside."

She paused in her vehemence.

"Jinny — have you ever reckoned with your beastly genius?"

Jane stirred in her corner. "I suppose," she said, "if it's any good I'll have to pay for it."

"You'll have to pay for it with everything you've got and with everything you haven't got and might have had. With a genius like yours, Jinny, there'll be no end to your paying. You may make up your mind to that."

"I wonder," said Jane, "how much George will have to pay?"

"Nothing. He'll make his wife pay. *You'd* have paid if he'd married you."

"I wonder. Nina—he was worth it. I'd have paid ten times over. So would you."

"I have paid. I paid beforehand. Which is a mistake."

She looked down at her feet. They were fine and feminine, Nina's feet, and exquisitely shod. She frowned at them as if they had offended her.

"Never again," she said, as if admonishing her feet. "Never again. There must be no more George Tanquerays. If I see one coming, I'll put a knife into myself, not hard enough to kill, but hard enough to hurt. I'll find out where it hurts most and keep it there. So that I may n't forget. If I have n't the pluck to stick it in myself, I'll get you to do it for me. You'll only have to say 'George Tanqueray.'"

Her murky face cleared suddenly.

"Look here," she said. "I *believe*, if any woman is to do anything stupendous, it means virginity. But I *know* it means that for you and me."



Jane started at this sudden voice of her own thought

XIV

AUGUST and September came. One by one the houses in Kensington Square had put on their white masks; but in the narrow brown house at the corner, among all the decorous drawn blinds and the closed shutters, the top-floor window stared wide awake on the abandoned Square.

Jane Holland had stayed in London because it was abandoned. She found a certain peace in the scattering and retreating in all directions of the terrible, converging, threatening multitudes of the clever little people, the multitudes that gather round celebrity, that pursue celebrity, that struggle and contend for celebrity among themselves. They had all gone away, carrying with them their own cleverness and Jane's celebrity. For her celebrity, at least her dreadful sense of it, vanished when they went.

She could go in and out of the Square now, really hidden, guarding her secret, no longer in peril, feeling herself obscure.

Not that she could really feel anything, or enjoy her obscurity or do anything with it now that she had got it. She was no longer a creature that felt or thought, or did things. You could not call it thinking, this possession of her mind by one tyrannous idea. Every morning she got up determined to get through the day without thinking of Tanqueray. But when she tried to read his face swam across the page, when she tried to write it thrust itself saliently, triumphantly, between her and the blank sheet. It seemed to say, "You'll never get rid of me that way." When she tried to eat he sat down beside her and took away her appetite. And whenever she dressed before the looking-glass he made her turn from her own reflection, saying to herself, "No wonder he didn't care for me, a woman with a face like that, fit to frighten the babies in Kensington Gardens."

He drove her out of doors at last, and she became simply a thing that walked; a thing caught in a snare and shut up in a little space where it could walk; a thing once wild that had forgotten the madness and anguish of its capture, that turned and turned, till all its senses served the solitary, perpetual impulse of its turning.

So Jane walked, without any sense of direction or deliverance, round and round in her cage of Kensington Gardens.

She did not stop to ask herself how she was to go on. She had a sort of sense that she would go on somehow, if only she hardened her heart. So she hardened it.

She hardened it, not only against the clever little people who had never touched it, but against Nicky and Nina and Laura. Laura's face in August had grown whiter than ever; it was taking on a fixed, strained look. This face, the face of her friend, appeared to Jane like something seen in a dream, something remotely, intangibly, incomprehensibly sad. But it had no power to touch her. She had hardened her heart against everybody she knew.

At last she succeeded in hardening it against the world, against the dawn and the sunset, and the grey skies at evening, against the living grass and the trees; she hardened it against everything that was beautiful and tender, because the beauty and the tenderness of things pierced it with an unbearable pain. It was hard to the very babies in the Gardens, where she walked.

One day she came upon a little boy running along the Broad Walk. The little boy was unable to stop because he believed himself to be a steam-engine, so he ran his small body into Jane and upset it violently at her feet. And Jane heard herself saying, "Why don't you look where you're going?" in a voice as hard as her heart.

Then she looked at the little boy and saw his eyes. They were the eyes that children have for all strange and sudden cruelties. They held her so that she did not stoop and pick him up. He picked himself up and ran to his mother, sobbing out his tale, telling her that he was a steam-engine, and he could n't stop.

And Jane turned away across the grass and sat down under a tree, holding her head high to keep her tears back, for they hurt. Her thoughts came in a tumult, tender, passionate, incoherent, mixed with the child's wail.

"I was a steam-engine and I could n't stop. I must n't care for George if it makes me knock little boys down in their pretty play and be cruel to them. I'll stop thinking about George this minute—I was a steam-engine and I could n't stop. No wonder he did n't care for me, a woman who could do a thing like that. I'll never, never think of him again—I wonder if he knew I was like that."

The pain that she had been trying to keep out had bitten its way through, it gnawed at her heart for days and made it tender, and in growing tender she grew susceptible to pain. She was aware of the world again; she knew the passion that the world absorbs from things that feel, and the soul that passes perpetually into its substance. It hurt her to see the beauty that came upon the Gardens in September evenings, to see the green earth alive under its web of silver air, and the trees as they stood enchanted in sunset and blue mist.

There had been a procession of such evenings, alike in that insupportable beauty and tenderness. On the last of these, the last of September, Jane was sitting in a place by herself under her tree. She could not say how or at what moment the incredible thing happened, but of a sudden the world she looked at became luminous and insubstantial and divinely still. She could not tell whether the stillness of the world had passed into her heart, or her heart into the stillness of the world. She could not tell what had happened to her at all. She only knew that after it had happened, a little while after, something woke out of sleep in her brain, and it was then that she saw Hambleby.

Up till this moment Hambleby had been only an idea in her head, and Tanqueray had taught her a profound contempt for ideas in her head. And the idea of Hambleby, of a little suburban banker's clerk, was one that he had defied her to deal with; she could not, he had said, really see him. She had given him up and forgotten all about him.

He arose with the oddest irrelevance out of the unfathomable peace. She could not account for him, nor understand why, when she was incapable of seeing him a year ago, she should see him now with such extreme distinctness and solidity. She saw him, all pink and blond and callow with excessive youth, advancing with his inevitable, suburban, adolescent smile. She saw his soul, the soul he inevitably would have, a blond and callow soul. She saw his Girl, the Girl he inevitably would have. She was present at the mingling of that blond soul with the dark flesh and blood of the Girl. She saw it all; the Innocence of Hambleby; the Marriage of Hambleby; the Torture and subsequent Deterioration of Hambleby; and, emerging in a sort of triumph, the indestructible Decency of Hambleby.

Heavens, what a book he would be.

Hambleby! She was afraid at first to touch him, he was so fragile and so divinely shy. Before she attempted, as Tanqueray would have said, to deal with him, he had lived in her for weeks, stirring a delicate excitement in her brain and a slight fever in her blood, as if she were falling in love with him. She had never possessed so completely this virgin ecstasy of vision, this beatitude that comes before the labour of creation. She walked in it, restless but exultant.

And when it came to positively dealing with him, she found that she had n't got to deal. Hambleby did it all himself, so alive was he, so possessed by the furious impulse to be born.

Now as long as Hambleby was there it was impossible for Jane to think about Tanqueray, and she calculated that Hambleby would last about a year. For a year, then, she might look to have peace from Tanqueray.

But in three months, towards the end of January, one half of Hambleby was done. It then occurred to her that if she was to behave absolutely as if nothing had happened she would have to show him to Tanqueray. Instead of showing him to Tanqueray she took him to Nina Lempriere and Laura Gunning.

That was how Jane came back to them. They sat till mid-

night over the fire in Nina's room, three of them where there had once been four.

"Do you like him?" said Jane.

"Rather!" It was Nina who spoke first. She lay at all her length along the hearth-rug, recklessly, and her speech was innocent of the literary taint.

"Jinny," said Laura, "he's divine. However did you think of him?"

"I did n't have to think. I simply saw him. Is there anything wrong with him?"

"Not a thing."

If there had been a flaw in him Laura would have found it. Next to Tanqueray she was the best critic of the four. There followed a discussion of technical points that left Hambleby intact. Then Laura spoke again.

"How George would have loved him."

Six months after, she still spoke of Tanqueray gently, as if he were dead.

Nina broke their silence.

"Does anybody know what's become of Tanks?"

They did not answer.

"Does n't that Nicholson man know?"

"Nicky thinks he's somewhere down in Sussex," said Jane.

"And where's she?"

"Wherever he is, I imagine."

"I gave her six months, if you remember."

"I wonder," said Laura, "why he does n't turn up."

"Probably," said Nina, "because he does n't want to."

"He might write. It is n't like him not to."

"No," said Jane, "it is n't like him." She rose. "Good-bye, I'm going."

She went, with a pain in her heart and a sudden fog in her brain that blurred the splendour of Hambleby.

"Perhaps," Laura continued, "he thinks *we* want to drop him. You know, if he has married a servant-girl it's what he would think."

"If," said Nina, "he thought about it at all."

"He'd think about Jinny."

"If he'd thought about Jinny he wouldn't have married a servant-girl."

It was then that Laura had her beautiful idea. She was always having them.

"It *was* Jinny he thought about. He thought about nothing else. He gave Jinny up for her own sake — for her career. You know what he thought about marrying."

She was in love with her idea. It made George sublime, and preserved Jinny's dignity. But Nina did not think much of it, and said so. She sat contemplating Laura a long time. "Queer Kiddy," she said, "very queer Kiddy."

It was her tribute to Laura's moral beauty.

"I say, Infant," she said suddenly, "were you ever in love?"

"Why should n't I be? I'm human," said the Infant.

"I doubt it. You're such a calm Kiddy. I'd like to know how it takes you."

"It does n't take me at all. I don't give it a chance."

"It does n't give *you* a chance, when it comes, my child."

"Yes, it does. There's always," said the Infant, speaking slowly, "just — one — chance. When you feel it coming."

"You don't feel it coming."

"I do. You asked me how it takes *me*. It takes me by stages. Gradual, insidious stages. In the first stage I'm happy, because it feels nice. In the second I'm terrified. In the third I'm angry and I turn round and stamp. Hard."

"Ridiculous baby. With *those* feet?"

"When those feet have done stamping there is n't much left to squirm, I can tell you."

"Let's look at them."

Laura lifted the hem of her skirt and revealed the marvel and absurdity of her feet.

"And they," said Nina, "stamped on George Tanqueray."

"It was n't half as difficult as it looks."

"You're a wonderful Kiddy, but you don't know what passion is, and you may thank your stars you don't."

"I might know quite a lot," said Laura, "if it was n't for Papa. Papa's a perfect safeguard against passion. I know beforehand that as long as he's there, passion is n't any good. You see," she explained, "it's so simple. I wouldn't marry anybody who wouldn't live with Papa. And nobody would marry me if he had to."

"I see. Is it very bad?"

"Pretty bad. He dreams and dreams *and* dreams."

"Won't that ever be better?"

Laura shook her head.

"It may be worse. There are things — that I'm afraid of."

"What things, Kiddy, what things?"

"Oh! I don't know ——"

"How on earth do you go on?"

"I shut my eyes. And I sit tight. And I go."

"Poor Kiddy. You give me a pain."

"I'm quite happy. I'm working like ten horses to get things done while I can." She smiled indomitably. "I'm glad Tanks did n't care for me. I could n't have let him in for all these — horrors. As for his marrying — I did n't want you to have him because he would n't have been good for you, but I *did* want Jinny to."

"And you don't mind — now?"

"There are so many things to mind. It's one nail driving out another."

"It's all the nails being hammered in at once, into your little coffin," said Nina. She drew closer to her, she put her arms round her and kissed her.

"Oh, don't! *Don't* be sorry for me. I'm all right."

She broke from Nina's hand that still caressed her.

"I am, really," she said. "I like Jinny better than anybody in the world except you and Tanks. And I like Nina better than all the Tankses that ever were."

("Nice Kiddy," Nina whispered into Laura's hair.)

"And now Tanks is married, he can't take you away from me."

"Nobody else can," said Nina. "We've stuck together. And we'll stick."

XV

THE creation of Hambleby moved on in a procession of superb chapters. Jane Holland was once more certain of herself, as certain as she had been in the days when she had shared the splendid obscurity of George Tanqueray. Her celebrity, by removing her from Tanqueray, had cut the ground from under her feet. So far from being uplifted by it, she had felt that there must be something wrong with her since she was celebrated and George Tanqueray was not. It was Tanqueray's belief in her that had kept her up. It consoled her with the thought that her celebrity was, after all, only a disgusting accident. For, through it all, in spite of the silliness of it, he did believe. He swore by her. He staked his own genius upon hers. As long as he believed in it she could not really doubt. But now for the first time since she was celebrated she believed in it herself.

She no longer thought of Tanqueray. Or, if she did think of him, her thinking no longer roused in her the old perverse, passionate jealousy. She no longer hated her genius because he had cared for it. She even foresaw that in time she might come to love it for that reason. But at the moment she was surrendered to it for its own sake.

She was beginning to understand the way of genius, of the will to create. She had discovered the secret and the rhythm of its life. It was subject to the law of the supersensible. To love anything more than this thing was to lose it. You had to come to it clean from all desire, naked of all possession. Placable to the small, perishing affections, it abhorred the shining, dangerous powers, the rival immortalities. It could not be expected to endure such love as she had had for Tanqueray. It rejoiced in taking Tanqueray away from her. For the divine

thing fed on suffering, on poverty, solitude, frustration. It took toll of the blood and nerves and of the splendour of the passions. And to those who did not stay to count the cost or measure the ruin, it gave back immeasurable, immortal things. It rewarded supremely the supreme surrender.

Nina Lempriere was right. Virginity was the law, the indispensable condition.

The quiet, inassailable knowledge of this truth had underlain Tanqueray's most irritable utterances. Tanqueray had meant that when he said, "The Lord our God is a consuming fire."

Jane saw now that there had been something wrong with her and with all that she had done since the idea of Tanqueray possessed her. She could put her finger on the flaws wrought by the deflected and divided flame. She had been caught and bound in the dark places of the house of life, and had worked there, seeing things only by flashes, by the capricious impulse of the fire, struggling, between the fall and rise of passion, to recover the perfection of the passionless hour. She had attained only the semblance of perfection, through sheer dexterity, a skill she had in fitting together with delicate precision the fragments of the broken dream. She defied even Tanqueray to tell the difference between the thing she had patched and mended and the thing she had brought forth whole.

She had been wonderful, standing there before Tanqueray, with her feet bound and her hands raised above the hands that tortured her, doing amazing things.

There was nothing amazing about Hambleby or a whole population of Hambleby's, given a heavenly silence, a virgin solitude, and a creator possessed by no power except the impulse to create. Within the four walls of her room, and in the quiet Square, nothing moved, nothing breathed but Hambleby. His presence destroyed those poignant, almost tangible memories of Tanqueray, those fragments of Tanqueray that adhered to the things that he had looked upon and touched. She was no longer afraid of these things or of the house that contained them. She no longer felt any terror of her solitude, any premonition of trouble as she entered the place. Away from it she found herself long-

ing for its stillness, for the very sight of the walls that folded her in this incomparable peace.

She had never known what peace was until now. If she had she would have been aware that her state was too exquisite to last. She had not allowed for the flight of the days and for the inevitable return of people, of the dreadful, clever little people. By November they had all come back. They found her behind her barricades. They approached, some tentatively, some insistently, some with an ingenuity no foresight could defeat. One by one they came. First Caro Bickersteth, and Caro once let in, it was impossible to keep out the rest. For Caro believed in knowing the right people, and in the right people knowing each other. It was Caro, last year, who had opened the innumerable doors by which they had streamed in, converging upon Jane. And they were more terrible than they had been last year, braced as they were by their sense of communion, of an intimacy so established that it ignored reluctance and refusal. They had given introductions to each other, and behind them, on the horrific verge, Jane saw the heaving, hovering multitudes of the as yet unIntroduced.

By December she realized again that she was celebrated; by January that she was hunted down, surrounded, captured, and alone.

For last year, when it all began, she had had George Tanqueray. Tanqueray had stood between her and the dreadful little people. His greatness sheltered her from their dreadfulness, their cleverness, their littleness. He had softened all the horrors of her pitiless celebrity, so that she had not felt herself half so celebrated as she was.

And now, six months after George's marriage, it was borne in upon her with appalling certitude that George was necessary to her, and that he was not there.

He had not even written to her since he married.

Then, as if he had a far-off sense of her need of him and of her agony, he wrote. Marriage had not destroyed his supernatural sympathy. Absolutely as if nothing had happened, he wrote. It was on the day after New Year's day, and if Jane

had behaved as if nothing had happened she would have written to *him*. But because she needed him, she could not bring herself to write.

"My dear Jinny," he wrote, "I have n't heard from you for centuries." (He must have expected, then, to hear.) "What's the matter? Is it Book?"

And Jane wrote back, "It is. Will you look at it?" "Nothing would please me better," said Tanqueray by return. Not a word about his wife. Jane sent Hambleby (by return also) and regretted it the moment after.

In two days a telegram followed. "Coming to see you to-day at four. Tanqueray."

Absolutely as if nothing had happened, he came. Her blood sang a song in her brain; her heart and all her pulses beat with the joy and tumult of his coming. But when he was there, when he had flung himself into his old place by the fireside and sat smiling at her across the hearthrug, of a sudden her brain was on the watch, and her pulses and her heart were still.

"What's been the matter?" he said. "You look worn out."

"I am worn out."

"With Book, Jinny?"

She smiled and shook her head. "No. With people, George. Everlasting people. I have to work like ten horses, and when I think I've got a spare minute, just to rest in, some one takes it. Look there. And there. And there."

His eyes followed her wild gesture. Innumerable little notes were stacked on Jinny's writing-table and lay littered among her manuscripts. Invitation cards, theatre tickets, telegrams were posted in every available space about the room, schedules of the tax the world levies on celebrity.

Tanqueray's brows crumpled as he surveyed the scene.

"Before I can write a line of Hambleby," said Jinny — "one little line — I've got to send answers to all that."

"You don't mean to tell me," he said sternly, "that you dream of answering?"

"If it could only end in dreaming."

He groaned. "Here have I been away from you, how long?"

Six months, is it? Only six months, Jinny, just long enough to get married in, and you go and do the very things I told you not to. You're not to be trusted by yourself for a single minute. I told you what it would be like."

"George dear, can't you do something? Can't you save me?"

"My dear Jinny, I've tried my level best to save you. But you would n't *be* saved."

"Ah," said she, "you don't know how I've hated it."

"Have n't you liked any of it?"

"No," she said slowly. "Not any of it."

"The praise, Jinny, did n't you like the praise? Were n't you just a little bit intoxicated?"

"Did I look intoxicated?"

"No-no. You carried it fairly well."

"Just at first, perhaps, just at first it goes to your head a bit. Then you get sick of it, and you don't want ever to have any more of it again. And all the time it makes you feel such a silly ass."

"You were certainly not cut out for a celebrity."

"But the awful thing is that when you've swallowed all the praise you can't get rid of the people. They come swarming and tearing and clutching at you, and bizzing in your ear when you want to be quiet. I feel as if I were being buried alive under awful avalanches of people."

"I told you you would be."

"If," she cried, "they'd only kill you outright. But they throttle you. You fight for breath. They let go and then they're at you again. They come telling you how wonderful you are and how they adore your work; and not one of them cares a rap about it. If they did they'd leave you alone to do it."

"Poor Jinny," he murmured.

"Why am I marked out for this? Why is it, George? Why should they take me and leave you alone?"

"It's your emotional quality that fetches them. But it's inconceivable how *you*'ve been fetched."

"I wanted to see what the creatures were like. Oh, George,

that I should be so punished when I only wanted to see what they were like."

"Poor Jinny. Poor gregarious Jinny."

She shook her head.

"It was so insidious. I can't think, I really can't think how it began."

"It began with those two spluttering imbecilities you asked me to dine with."

"Oh no, poor things, they haven't hurt me. They've gone on to dine at other tables. They're in it, too. They're torn and devoured. They dine and are dined on."

"But, my dear child, you must stop it."

"If I could. If I could only break loose and get away."

"Get away. What keeps you?"

"Everything keeps me."

"By everything you mean ——?"

"London. London does something to your brain. It jogs it and shakes it; and all the little ideas that had gone to sleep in their little cells get up and begin to dance as if they heard music. Everything wakes them up, the streams of people, the eyes and the faces. It's you and Nina and Laura. It's ten thousand things. Can't you understand, George?"

"It's playing the devil with your nerves, Jinny."

"Not when I go about in it alone. That's the secret."

"It looks as if you were alone a lot, does n't it?" He glanced significantly around him.

"Oh — that!"

"Yes," he said, "that. Will you really let me save you?"

"Can you?"

"I can, if I do it my own way."

"I don't care how you do it."

"Good." He rose. "Is there anything in those letters you mind my seeing?"

"Not a word."

He sat down at her writing-table and stirred the litter with rapid, irritable hands. In two minutes he had gathered into a heap all the little notes of invitation. He then went round the

room collecting the tickets and the cards and the telegrams. These he added to his heap.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going," he said, "to destroy this hornets' nest you've raised about you."

He took it up, carrying it gingerly, as if it stung, and dropped it on the fire.

"George ——" she cried, and sat looking at him as he stirred the pile to flame and beat down its ashes into the grate. She was paralyzed, fascinated by the bold splendour of his deed.

"There," he said: "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Yes." She smiled. "You can tell me what I'm to say to my stepmother."

"Your stepmother?"

"She wants to know if I'll have Effy."

"Effy?"

"My half-sister."

"Well?"

"I think, George, I may have to have her."

"Have her? It's you who'll be had. Don't I tell you you're always being had?"

He looked down at her half-tenderly, smiling at the pathos, the absurd pathos of her face. He was the same George Tanqueray that he had always been, except he was no longer restless, no longer excited.

"Jinny," he said, "if you begin to gather round you a family, or even the rudiments of a family, you're done for. And so is Hambleby."

She said nothing.

"Can you afford to have him done for?"

"If it would help them, George."

"You want to help them?"

"Of course I do."

"But you can't help them without Hambleby. It's he who goes out and rakes in the shekels, not you."

"Ye-es. I know he does."

"Apart from Hambleby what are you? A simple idiot."

Jane's face expressed her profound and contrite persuasion of this truth.

"Well," he said, "have you written to the lady?"

"Not yet."

"Then sit down and write to her now exactly what I tell you. It will be a beautiful letter; in your manner, not mine."

He stood over her and dictated the letter. It had a firmness of intention that no letter of Jinny's to her people had hitherto expressed, but in all other respects it was a masterly reproduction of Jinny's style.

"I am going to post this myself," he said, "because I can't trust you for a minute."

He ran out bareheaded and came back again.

"You can't do without me," he said, "you can't do without me for a minute."

He sat down in his old place, and began, always as if nothing had happened. "And now about Hambleby. Another day, Jinny, and I should have been too late to save him."

"But, George, it's awful. They'll never understand. They don't realize the deadly grind. They see me moving in scenes of leisured splendour."

"Tell them you don't move in scenes of leisured anything."

"The scenes I do move in! I was so happy once, when I hadn't any money, when nobody but you knew anything about me."

"Were you really, Jinny?"

"Yes. And before that, when I was quite alone. Think of the hours, the days, the months I had to myself."

"Then the curse fell, and you became celeb—— Even then, with a little strength of mind, you might have saved yourself. Do you think, if I became celebrated, I should give myself up to be devoured?"

"If I could only not be celebrated," she said. "Do you think I can ever creep back into my hole again and be obscure?"

"Yes, if you'll write a book that nobody but I can read."

"Why, is n't Hambleby ——?"

"Not he. He'll only make things worse for you. Ten times worse."

"How do you mean?"

"He may make you popular."

"Is *that* what you think of him?"

"Oh, I think a lot of him. So do you."

He smiled his old teasing and tormenting smile.

"Are you sure you're not just a little bit in love with that little banker's clerk?"

"I was never in love with a banker's clerk in my life. I've never even seen one except *in* banks and tubes and places."

"I don't care. It's the way you'll be had. It's the way you'll be had by Hambleby if you don't look out. It's the way," he said, "that's absolutely forbidden to any artist. You've got to know Hambleby outside and inside, as God Almighty knows him."

"Well?" Jinny's mind was working dangerously near certain personal matters. George himself seemed to be approaching the same borders. He plunged in an abyss of meditation and emerged.

"You can't know people, you can't possibly hope to know them, if you once allow yourself to fall in love with them."

"Can't you?" she said quietly.

"No, you can't. If God Almighty had allowed himself to fall in love with you and me, Jinny, he could n't have made us all alive and kicking. You must be God Almighty to Hambleby or he won't kick."

"Does n't he kick?"

"Oh, Lord, yes. You have n't gone in deep enough to stop him. I'm only warning you against a possible danger. It's always a possible danger when I'm not there to look after you."

He rose. "Anything," he said, "is possible when I'm not there."

She rose also. Their hands and their eyes met.

"That's it," she said, "you were n't there, and you won't be."

"You're wrong," said he, "I've always been there when you wanted me."

He turned to go and came back again.

"If I don't like to see you celebrated, Jinny, it's because I want to see you immortal."

"You don't want to be alone in your immortality?"

"No. I don't want to be alone—in my immortality."

With that he left her. And he had not said a word about his wife.

Neither for that matter had Jane. She wondered why she had not.

"At any rate," she thought, "*I* have n't hurt his immortality."

XVI

A WEEK after his visit to Jane Holland, Tanqueray was settled, as he called it, in rooms in Bloomsbury. He had got all his books and things sent down from Hampstead, to stay in Bloomsbury for ever, because Bloomsbury was cheap.

It had not occurred to him to think what Rose was to do with herself in Bloomsbury or he with Rose. He had brought her up out of the little village of Sussex where they had lodged, in a farmhouse, ever since their marriage. Rose had been happy down in Sussex.

And for the first few weeks Tanqueray had been happy too. He was never tired of playing with Rose, caressing Rose, talking nonsense to Rose, teasing and tormenting Rose for ever. The more so as she provoked him by turning an imperturbable face to the attack. He liked to lie with his head in Rose's lap, while Rose's fingers played with his hair, stirring up new ideas to torment her with. He was content, for the first few weeks, to be what he had become, a sane and happy animal, mated with an animal, a dear little animal, superlatively happy and incorruptibly sane.

He might have gone on like that for an interminable number of weeks but that the mere rest from all intellectual labour had a prodigiously recuperative effect. His genius, just because he had forgotten all about it, began with characteristic perversity to worry him again. It would n't let him alone. It made him more restless than Rose had ever made him. It led him into ways that were so many subtle infidelities to Rose. It tore him from Rose and took him out with it for long tramps beyond the Downs; wherever they went it was always too far for Rose to go. He would try, basely, to get off without her seeing him, and managed it, for Rose was so sensible that she never saw.

Then it made him begin a book. He wrote all morning in a

room by himself. All afternoon he walked by himself. All evening he lay with his head in Rose's lap, too tired even to tease her.

But, because she had Tanqueray's head to nurse in the evenings, Rose had been happy down in Sussex. She went about the farm and stroked all the animals. She borrowed the baby at the farm and nursed it half the day. And in the evening she nursed Tanqueray's head. Tanqueray's head was never bothered to think what Rose was doing when she was not nursing it.

Then, because his book made him think of Jane Holland, he sat down one day and wrote that letter to Jinny. .

He did not know that it was because of Jinny that he had come back to live in Bloomsbury.

They had been a month in Bloomsbury, in a house in Torrington Square. Rose was sitting alone in the ground-floor room that looked straight on to the pavement. Sitting with her hands before her waiting for Tanqueray to come to lunch. Tanqueray was up-stairs, two flights away, in his study, writing. She was afraid to go and tell him lunch was ready. She had gone up once that morning to see that he did n't let his fire out, and he had n't liked it; so she waited. There was a dish of cutlets keeping hot for him on the hearth. Presently he would come down, and she would have the pleasure of putting the cutlets on the table and seeing him eat them. It was about the only pleasure she could count on now.

For to Rose, as she sat there, the thought had come that for all she saw of her husband she might as well not be married to him. She had been better off at Hampstead when she waited on him hand and foot; when she was doing things for him half the day; when, more often than not, he had a minute to spare for a word or a look that set her heart fairly dancing. She had agreed to their marriage chiefly because it would enable her to wait on him and nobody but him, to wait on him all day long.

And he had said to her, first thing, as they dined together on their wedding-day, that he was n't going to let his wife wait on him. That was why they lived in rooms (since he could n't afford a house and servant), that she might be waited on. He

had hated to see her working, he said; and now she would n't have to work. No, never again. And when she asked him if he liked to see her sitting with her hands before her, doing nothing, he said that was precisely what he did like. And it had been all very well so long as he had been there to see her. But now he was n't ever there.

It was worse than it was down in Sussex. All morning he shut himself up in his study to write. After lunch he went up there again to smoke. Then he would go out by himself, and he might or might not come in for dinner. All evening he shut himself up again and wrote. At midnight or after he would come to her, worn out, and sleep, lying like a dead man at her side.

She was startled by the sound of the postman's knock and the flapping fall of a letter in the letter-box. It was for Tanqueray, and she took it up to him and laid it beside him without a word. To speak would have been fatal. He had let his fire go out (she knew he would); so, while he was reading his letter, she knelt down by the hearth and made it up again. She went to work very softly, but he heard her.

"What are you doing there?" he said.

"I thought," said she, "I was as quiet as a mouse."

"So you were. Just about. A horrid little mouse that keeps scratching at the wainscot and creeping about the room and startling me."

"Do I startle you?"

"You do. Horribly."

Rose put down the poker without a sound.

He had finished his letter and had not begun writing again. He was only looking at his letter. So Rose remarked that lunch was ready. He put the letter into a drawer, and they went down.

About half-way through lunch he spoke.

"Look here," he said, "you *must* keep out of the room when I'm writing."

"You're always writing now."

Yes. He was always writing now; because he did not want

to talk to Rose and it was the best way of keeping her out of the room. But as yet he did not know that was why, any more than he knew that he had come to live in London because he wanted to talk to Jinny. The letter in his drawer up-stairs was from Jinny, asking him if she might not come and see his wife. He was not sure that he wanted her to come and see his wife. Why should she?

"You'll 'urt your brain," his wife was saying, "if you keep on writ-writin', lettin' the best of the day go by before you put your foot out of doors. It would do you all the good in the world if you was to come sometimes for a walk with me ——"

It all went in at one ear and out of the other.

So all morning, all afternoon, all evening, Rose sat by herself in the room looking on the pavement. She had nothing to do in this house that did n't belong to them. When she had helped the little untidy servant to clear away the breakfast things; when she had dusted their sitting-room and bedroom; when she had gone out and completed her minute marketings, she had nothing to do. Nothing to do for herself; worse than all, nothing to do for Tanqueray. She would hunt in drawers for things of his to mend, going over his socks again and again in the hope of finding a hole in one of them. Rose, who loved taking care of people, who was born in the world and fashioned by Nature to that end, Rose had nothing to take care of. You could n't take care of Tanqueray.

Sometimes she found herself wishing that he were ill. Not dangerously ill, but ill enough to be put to bed and taken care of. Not that Rose was really aware of this cruel hope of hers. It came to her rather as a picture of Tanqueray, lying in his sleeping-suit, adorably helpless, and she nursing him. Her heart yearned to that vision.

For she saw visions. From perpetual activities of hands and feet, from running up and down stairs, from sweeping and dusting, from the making of beds, the washing of clothes and china, she had passed to the life of sedentary contemplation. She was always thinking. Sometimes she thought of nothing but Tanqueray. Sometimes she thought of Aunt and Uncle, of Minnie

and the seven little dogs. She could see them of a Sunday evening, sitting in the basement parlour, Aunt in her black cashmere with the gimp trimmings, Uncle in his tight broadcloth with his pipe in his mouth, and Mrs. Smoker sleeping with her nose on the fender. Mr. Robinson would come in sometimes, dressed as Mr. Robinson could dress, and sit down at the little piano and sing in his beautiful voice, "'Ark, 'Ark, my Soul," and "The Church's one Foundation," while Joey howled at all his top notes, and the smoke came curling out of Uncle's pipe, and Rose sat very still dreaming of Mr. Tanqueray. (She could never hear "Hark, Hark, my Soul," now, without thinking of Tanqueray.)

Sometimes she thought of that other life, further back, in her mistress's house at Fleet, all the innocent service and affection, the careful, exquisite tending of the delicious person of Baby, her humble, dutiful intimacy with Baby's mother. She would shut her eyes and feel Baby's hands on her neck, and the wounding pressure of his body against her breasts. And then Rose dreamed another dream.

She no longer cared to sew now, but when Tanqueray's mending was done, she would sit for hours with her hands before her, dreaming.

He found her thus occupied one evening when he had come home after seeing Jane. After seeing Jane he was always rather more aware of his wife's existence than he had been, so that he was struck now by the strange dejection of her figure. He came to her and stood, leaning against the chimney-piece and looking down at her, as he had stood once and looked down at Jane.

"What is it?" he said.

"It's nothing. I've a cold in me head."

"Cold in your head! You've been crying. There's a blob on your dress." (He kissed her.) "What are you crying about?"

"I'm not cryin' about *anything*."

"But — you're crying." It gave him pain to see Rose crying.

"If I am it's the first time I've done it."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Certain. I never *was* one for cryin', nor for bein' seen cry. It's just — it's just sittin' here with me 'ands before me, havin' nothing to do."

"I suppose there is n't very much for you to do."

"I've done all there is and a great deal there is n't."

"I say, shall we go to the play to-night?"

She smiled with pleasure at his thought for her. Then she shook her head. "It's not plays I want — it's work. I'd like to have me hands full. If we had a little house ——"

"Oh no. No — no — no." He looked terrified.

"It would come a lot cheaper. Only a *little* house, where I could do all the work."

"I've told you before I won't let you."

"With a girl," she pleaded, "to scrub. A little house up Hampstead way."

"I don't want to live up Hampstead way."

"If you mean Uncle and Aunt," she said, "they would n't think of intrudin'. We settled that, me and Uncle. I'd be as happy as the day is long."

"You're *not*? And the day is very long, is it?"

He kissed her, first on her mouth and then on the lobe of the ear that was next to him.

"Kissin's all very well," said Rose. "You never kissed me at Hampstead, and you don't know how happy I was there. Doin' things for you."

"I don't want things done for me."

"No. I wish you did."

"And, Rose, I don't want to be bothered with a house; to be tied to a house; to have anything to do with a house."

"Would it worry you?"

"Abominably. And think of the horrors of moving!"

"I'd move you," said Rose.

"I could n't. Look here. It would kill that book. I must have peace. This is a beastly hole, I know, but there's peace in it. You don't know what that damned book *is*."

She gave up the idea of a house; and seven months after her marriage, she fell into a melancholy.

Sometimes, now, on a fine afternoon, she would go out into the streets and look listlessly through shop-windows at hats and gowns and all the pretty things she would have thought it sin so much as to desire to wear. Where Rose lingered longest was outside those heavenly places where you saw far off a flutter of white in the windows, which turned out to be absurd, tiny, short-waisted frocks and diminutive under-garments, and little heart-rending shoes; things of desire, things of impossible dream, to be approached with a sacred dumbness of the heart.

The toy-shops, too, they carried her away in a flight; so that Rose caught herself saying to herself, "Some day, perhaps, I shall be here buying one of them fur animals, or that there Noah's ark."

Then, p'raps, she said to her very inmost self, things might be different.

Sometimes she would go up to Hampstead, ridin', as she phrased it, in a bus, to see her Aunt and Uncle and a friend she had, Polly White. Not often; for Rose did not hold with gadding about when you had a husband; besides, she was afraid of Aunt asking her, "Wot's 'E doin'?" (By always referring to Tanqueray as "'E," Mrs. Eldred evaded the problem of what she was expected to call the gentleman who had so singularly married her husband's niece.) Most of all Rose dreaded the question, "Wen is 'E goin' to take a little 'ouse?" For in Rose's world it is somewhat of a reflection on a married man if he is not a householder.

And last time Mrs. Eldred's inquiries had taken a more terrible and searching form. "Is 'E lookin' for anything to do besides 'Is writin'?" Rose had said then that no, he need n't, they'd got enough; an answer that brought Mrs. Eldred round to her point again. "Then why does n't 'E take a little 'ouse?"

Sometimes Polly White came to tea in Bloomsbury. Very seldom, though, and only when Tanqueray was not there. Rose knew and Polly knew that her friends had to keep away when her husband was about. As for *his* friends, she had never caught a sight of them.

Then, all of a sudden, when Rose had given up wondering

whether things would ever be different, Tanqueray, instead of going up-stairs as usual, sat down and lit a pipe as if he were going to spend the evening with her. Rose did not know whether she would be allowed to talk. He seemed thoughtful, and Rose knew better than to interrupt him when he was thinking.

"Rose," he said at last, apparently as the result of his meditation, "a friend of mine wants to call on you to-morrow."

"To call on *me*?"

"On you, certainly."

"Shall I have to see him?"

"She, Rose, she. Yes; I think you'll have to see her."

"I did n't know," said Rose, "you had a friend."

She meant what she would have called a lady friend.

"I've dozens," said Tanqueray, knowing what she meant.

"You have n't told me this one's name yet."

"Her name is Jane Holland."

It was Rose who became thoughtful now.

"As she anything to do with the Jane Holland that's on those books of yours?"

"She wrote 'em."

"You did n't tell me you knew her."

"Did n't I?"

"I suppose that's how you knew her."

"Yes. That's how I knew her."

"What made 'er take to writin'? Is she married?"

"No."

"I see," said Rose, almost as if she really saw. "And wot shall I've to do?"

"You'll write a pretty little note to her and ask her to tea."

"Oh dear!"

"You need n't be afraid of her."

"I'm not afraid; but goodness knows what I shall find to talk about."

"You can talk about me."

"I suppose I *shall* 'ave to talk to her?"

"Well — yes. Or — I can talk to her."

Rose became very thoughtful indeed.

"Wot 's she like?"

He considered. What *was* Jinny like? Like nothing on earth that Rose had ever seen.

"I mean," said Rose, "to look at."

"I don't know that I can tell you what she's like."

"Is she like Miss Kentish? You remember Miss Kentish at Hampstead?"

He smiled. "Not in the very least."

Rose looked depressed. "Is she like Mrs. 'Enderson down at Fleet?"

"That's nearer. But she's not like Mrs. Henderson. She's — she's charming."

"So's Mrs. 'Enderson."

"It's another sort of charm. I don't even know whether you'd see it."

"Ah, *you* should have seen Mrs. 'Enderson with Baby. They was a perfect picture."

"That's it. I can't see Miss Holland with Baby. I can only see her by herself."

"I wish," said Rose, "she was married. Because, if she 'ad been, there might be something ——"

"Something?"

"Well — to talk about."

It was his turn to say "I see."

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, thus closing the sitting, and settled down to a long correspondence in arrears.

At bed-time Rose spoke again.

"How old is she?" Rose said.

XVII

THE next day at four o'clock Rose had on her best gown and was bright-eyed and pink. Brighter-eyed and pinker than Tanqueray had seen her for many weeks. She was excited, not so much by the prospect of seeing Miss Holland as by the beautiful vision of her tea-table. There was a cake with sugar icing on it, and bread and butter rolled as Rose had seen it rolled at Fleet. She had set out the tea-service that her aunt had given her for a wedding-present. The table cloth had a lace edge to it which gratified Rose whenever she thought of it. Tanqueray had on his nicest suit, and Rose's gaze travelled up and down it, and paused in ecstasy at his necktie.

"You do pay for dressin'," she said.

"I do indeed," said Tanqueray.

Rose got on very well at tea-time. It was marvellous how many things she found to say. The conversation really made itself. She had only to sit there and ask Miss Holland how she liked her tea, weak or strong, and if she took so much milk or a little drop more, and sugar, one lump or two lumps, and that sized lump or a little larger? She spun it out till George was ready to begin talking. And there came a beautiful and sacred silence while Rose made Tanqueray's tea and gave it him.

After seven months it was still impossible for Rose to hide her deep delight in waiting on him. More than once her eyes turned from Jane to watch him in the wonderful and interesting acts of eating and drinking.

For a moment Jane suffered an abominable pang as she realized the things that were permissible to Rose, the things that she could say to Tanqueray, the things that she might do for him. At first she had looked away so that she might not see these tender approaches of Rose to Tanqueray. Then she remembered that this was precisely what she had come out to

see,—that she had got to realize Rose. And thus, as she brought herself round to face it fairly, she caught in a flash Rose's attitude and the secret of it.

It was not a thing flung in her face to madden her, it had no bridal insolence about it, and none of the consecrated folly of the bride. It was a thing of pathos and of innocence, something between the uncontrollable tenderness, the divine infatuation of a mother, and the crude obsession of a girl uncertain of the man she has set her unhappy heart on; a thing, Rose's attitude, stripped of all secrecy by its sadness.

But there was nothing abject in it. It was strong; it was militant under its pathos and its renunciation. With such a look Rose would have faced gates of death closing between her and Tanqueray.

So Jane realized Rose.

And she said to herself, "What a good thing Tanks never did care for me. It would be awful if I made her more uncertain of him."

At this moment Tanqueray said, "How's Hambleby?"

"He's not quite so well as he was," said Jane.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Tanqueray.

"Is anybody ill?" said Rose. She was always interested in anybody who was ill.

"Only Hambleby," said Tanqueray.

"Who's he?" said Rose.

"The man Jinny's in love with."

Rose was shocked at this violation of the holy privacies. She looked reprovingly at Tanqueray.

"Is your tea as you like it?" she inquired, with tact, to make it more comfortable for Jane.

"I'm going to smoke," said Tanqueray. "Will you come to my den, Jinny, and talk about Hambleby?"

Rose looked as if positively she couldn't believe her ears. But it was at Jane that she looked, not at Tanqueray.

"No," said Jinny. "I don't want to talk about Hambleby. I want to talk to your wife."

"You mustn't mind what 'e says," said Rose, when they

were alone together, "'E sometimes says things to me that make me fair jump."

"I did n't jump," said Jane, "did I?"

"No. You took it a deal better than I should have done."

It was odd, but Rose was ten times more at her ease since Tanqueray's awful reference to Hambleby. And she seemed happier, too.

"You see," said Jane, "there was n't much to take. Hambleby's only a man in a book I'm writing."

"Oh — only a man in a book."

Rose looked depressed. There was a silence which even Jane found it difficult to break. Then she had an inspiration.

"I'm supposed to be in love with him because I can't think or talk about anything else."

"That's just like Mr. Tanqueray," said Rose.

"Only he is n't in love with the people in his books," said Jane.

"He must think a deal of 'em."

"He says he does n't."

"Well — 'e's always thinkin' when he is n't writin'."

There was trouble on Rose's face.

"Miss 'Olland — 'ow many hours do *you* sit at it?"

"Oh, it depends."

"'E's sittin' all day sometimes, and 'arf the night. And my fear is," said Rose, "'e'll injure 'is brain."

"It will take a good deal to injure it. It's very tough. He'll leave off when he's tired."

"He has n't left off for months and months."

Her trouble deepened.

"Did 'e always work that 'ard?"

"No," said Jane. "I don't think he ever did."

"Then w'y," said Rose, coming straight to her point, "is he doin' it now?"

They looked at each other; and somehow Jane knew why he was doing it. She wondered if Rose knew; if she suspected.

"He's doing it," she said, "because he *can* do it. You've had a good effect on him."

"Do you think, do you really think it's *me!*"

"I do indeed," said Jane, with immense conviction.

"And you think it does n't hurt him?"

"No. Does him good. You should be glad when you see him writing."

"If," said Rose, "I *could* see 'im. But I've bin settin' here thinkin'. I lie awake sometimes at night till I'm terrified wonderin' wot's 'appenin', and whether 'is brain won't give way with 'im drivin' it. You see, we 'ad a lodger once and 'e overworked 'is brain and 'ad to be sent orf quick to the asylum. That's wot's frightened me."

"But I don't suppose the lodger's brain was a bit like Mr. Tanqueray's."

"That's wot I keep sayin' to myself. People's brains is different. But there's been times when I could have taken that old book away from him and hidden it, thinkin' that might be for his good."

"It would n't be for his good."

"No," said Rose, "I'm not that certain that it would. That's why I don't do it."

She became pensive.

"Besides, it's 'is pleasure. Why, it's all the pleasure he's got."

She looked up at Jane. Her thoughts swam in her large eyes.

"It's awful, is n't it," said she, "not knowin' wot really is for people's good?"

"I'm afraid we must trust them to know best."

"Well," said Rose, "I'll just let 'im alone. That's safest." Jane rose.

"You must n't worry," said she.

"I don't," said Rose. "He hates worryin'."

She looked up again into Jane's face as one beholding the calm face of wisdom.

"You've done me good," said she.

Jane stooped and kissed her. She kissed Tanqueray's wife.

"Do you know," she said, "you are what I thought you would be."

Rose's eyes grew rounder.

"And what's that?"

"Something very sweet and nice."

Rose's face was a soft mist of smiles and blushes. "Fancy that," she said.

"Why did you let her go away without telling me?" said Tanqueray, half-an-hour later.

"I did n't think," said Rose. "We got talking."

"What did you talk about?"

She would not tell.

XVIII

SHE had known all the time that if she was not to go on thinking about George Tanqueray she must see his wife. When she had once thoroughly realized his wife it would be easier to give him up to her.

It was George who had tried to prevent her realizing Rose. He, for his part, refused to be given up to Rose or in any way identified with her. Nina was right. His marriage had made no difference to George.

But now that she realized Rose, it made all the difference to Jane. Rose was realized so completely that she turned George out of the place he persisted in occupying in Jane's mind. Jane had not allowed herself to feel that there was anything to be sorry about in George's marriage. She was afraid of having to be sorry for George, because, in that case, there would be no end to her thinking about him. But if there was any sorrow in George's marriage it was not going to affect George. She would not have to be sorry about him.

Like Nina, Jane was sorry for the woman.

That little figure strayed in and out of Jane's mind without disturbing her renewed communion with Hambleby.

Up till now she had contrived to keep the very existence of Hambleby a secret from her publishers. But they had got wind of him somehow, and had written many times inquiring when he would be ready? As if she could tell, as if her object was to get him ready, and not rather to prolong the divine moments of his creation. She would have liked to have kept him with her in perpetual manuscript, for in this state he still seemed a part of herself. Publicity of any sort was a profanation. When published he would be made to stand in shop windows coarsely labelled, offering himself for sale at four-and-six; he would go into the houses of people who could n't possibly appreciate him,

and would suffer unspeakable things at their hands. As the supreme indignity, he would be reviewed. And she, his creator, would be living on him, profiting by his degradation at percentages which made her blush. To be thinking of what Hambleby would "fetch" was an outrage to his delicate perfection.

But she had to think of it; and after all, when she had reckoned ~~it~~ up, he would not "fetch" so very much. She had failed to gather in one half of the golden harvest. The serial rights of Hambleby lay rotting in the field. George used to manage all these dreadful things for her. For though George was not much cleverer than she he liked to think he was. It was his weakness to imagine that he had a head for business. And in the perversity of things he had really done better for her than he had ever done for himself. That was the irony of it; when, if she could, she would have taken her luck and shared it with him.

Anyhow, business without George had been very uninteresting; and therefore she had not attended to it. There had been opportunities as golden as you please, but she had not seized them. There had been glorious openings for Hambleby, far-reaching prospects, noble vistas, if only he had been born six months sooner. And when George said that Hambleby would be popular, he was, of course, only tormenting her. He never meant half of the unpleasant things he said.

It was now April. Hambleby waited only for the crowning chapter. The arrangements for his publication had been made, all but the date, which was left unsettled, in case at the last moment a new opening should be found.

At four o'clock on an April afternoon Jane was meditating on her affairs when the staircase bell rang somewhat imperiously. It sounded like somebody determined to get in. A month ago she would have taken no notice of it. Now she was afraid not to open her door lest Tanqueray should be there.

It was not Tanqueray. It was Hugh Brodrick.

For a second she wondered at him, not taking him in. She had forgotten that Brodrick existed. It was his eyes she recognized him by. They were fixed on her, smiling at her wonder.

He stood on the little square of landing between the door and the foot of the staircase.

"Of course," he said. "You're just going out?"

"No, do come in."

"May I? I don't believe you know in the least who I am."

"I do, really. I'm very glad to see you."

He followed her up the stairs and into her sitting-room, the small white-painted sitting-room, with its three straight windows looking on the Square. He went to one of the windows and looked out.

"Yes," he said, "there is a charm about it."

He spoke as if his mind had been long occupied with this place she lived in; as if they had disputed together many times as to the attraction of Kensington Square, and he had been won over, at last, reluctantly, to her view. It all strengthened the impression he gave of being absorbed in her.

He turned to her.

"You like living here? All alone? Cut off from everybody?"

She remembered then how they had really discussed this question.

"I like it very much indeed."

"Well ——" (He said it sadly.) "Do you write in this room? At that table?"

"Yes."

He looked at the table as if he thought it all very interesting and very incomprehensible and very sad. He looked at the books on the shelf close to the table and read George Tanqueray's name on them. He frowned slightly at the books and turned away.

She sat down. He did not take the chair she indicated, but chose another where he could see her rather better. He was certainly a man who knew his own mind.

"I've called," he said, "a great many times. But I've always missed you."

"So at last you gave it up? Like everybody else."

"Does it look as if I'd given it up?"

She could not say it did.

"No," he said. "I never give anything up. In that I'm not like everybody else."

He was n't, she reflected. And yet somehow he ought to have been. There was nothing so very remarkable about him.

He smiled. "I believe," he said, "you thought I was the man come to tune the piano."

"Did I look as if I did?"

"A little."

"Do I now?" She was beginning to like Brodrick.

"Not so much. As it happens, I have come partly for the pleasure of seeing you and partly — to discuss, if you don't mind, some business."

Jane was aware of a certain relief. If it was that he came for —

"I don't know whether you've heard that I'm bringing out a magazine?"

"Oh yes. I remember you were bringing it out —"

"I was thinking of bringing it out when I last met you. It may interest you, because it's to have nothing in it that is n't literature. I'm going in for novels, short stories, essays, poems. No politics."

"Won't that limit your circulation?"

"Of course it'll limit it. Still, it's not easy to keep honest if you go in for politics."

"I see. Rather than not be honest you prefer to limit your circulation?"

He blushed like a man detected in some meanness; the supreme meanness of vaunting his own honesty.

"Oh, well, I don't know about that. Politics means my brother-in-law. If I keep them out I keep him out, and run the thing my own way. I dare say that's all there is in it."

Certainly she liked him. He struck her as powerful and determined. With his magazine, he had the air of charging, sublimely, at the head of the forlorn hope of literature.

"It's taken me all this time to get the capital together. But I've got it."

"Yes. You would get it."

He looked up gravely inquiring.

"You strike me as being able to get things."

He flushed with pleasure. "Do I? I don't know. If I can get the authors I want I believe I can make the magazine one of the big things of the century." He said it quietly, as if inspired by caution rather than enthusiasm. "*They* 'll make it — if I can get them."

"Are they so difficult?"

"The ones I want are. I don't want any but the best."

She smiled.

"It's all very well to smile; but this kind of magazine has n't really been tried before. There's room for it."

"Oh, oceans of *room*."

"And it will have all the room there is. Now's its moment. All the good old magazines are dead."

"And gone to heaven because they were so good."

"Because they were old. My magazine will be young."

"There has been frightful mortality among the young."

"I know the things you mean. They were decadent, neurotic, morbid, worse than old. My magazine will be really young. It's the young writers that I want. And there is n't one of them I want as much as you."

She seemed to have hardly heard him.

"Have you asked Mr. Tanqueray?"

"Not yet. You're the first I've asked. The very first."

"You should have asked him first."

"I did n't want him first."

"You should have wanted him. Why" (she persisted), "did you come to me before him?"

"Because you're so much more valuable to me."

"In what way?"

"Your name is better known."

"It ought n't to be. If it's names you want ——" She gave him a string of them.

"Your name stands for more."

"And Mr. Tanqueray's? Does it not stand?"

He hesitated.

She insisted. "If mine does."

"I am corrupt," said Brodrick, "and mercenary and brutal."

"I wish you were n't," said she, so earnestly that he laughed.

"My dear Miss Holland, we cannot blink the fact that you have a name and he has n't."

"Or that my name sells and his does n't. Is that it?"

"Not altogether. If I could n't get you I'd try to get him."

"Would you? How do you know that you're going to get me?"

He smiled. "I don't. I only know that I'm prepared, if I may say so, to pay for you."

"Oh," she said, "it is n't that."

He smiled again at her horror.

"I know it is n't that. Still ——" He named a round sum, a sum so perfect in its roundness that it took her breath away. With such a sum she could do all that she wanted for her sister Effy at once, and secure herself against gross poverty for years.

"It's more than we could give Mr. Tanqueray."

"Is it?"

"Much more."

"That's what's so awful," she said.

He noticed how she clenched her hands as she said it.

"It's not my fault, is it?"

"Oh — I don't care whose fault it is!"

"But you care?"

"Yes." She almost whispered it.

He was struck by that sudden drop from vehemence to pathos.

"He is a very great friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"And — he's just married, is n't he?"

"Yes. And he is n't very well off. I don't think he could afford ——" she said.

He coloured painfully as if she had suspected him of a desire to traffic in Tanqueray's poverty.

"We should pay him very well," he said.

"His book" (she pressed it on him), "is not arranged for."

"And yours is?"

"Practically it is. The contract's drawn up, but the date's not settled."

"If the date's not settled, surely I've still a chance?"

"And he," she said, "has still a chance if — I fail you?"

"Of course — if you *fail* me."

"And supposing that I had n't got a book?"

"But you have."

"Supposing?"

"Then I should fall back on Mr. Tanqueray."

"Fall back on him! — The date is settled."

"But I thought ——"

"I've settled it."

"Oh. And it can't be unsettled?"

"It can't — possibly."

"Why not?"

She meditated. "Because — it would spoil the chances of the book."

"I see. The chances of the book."

Their eyes met in conflict. It was as if they were measuring each other's moral value.

"I should make you a bigger offer, Miss Holland," he said; "only I believe you don't want that."

"No. Certainly I don't want that."

He paused. "Do you mind telling me if you've any other chance?"

"None. Not the ghost of one."

"So that, but for this all-important question of the date, I might have had you?"

"You might have had me."

"I'm almost glad," he said, "to have lost you — that way."

"Which way?" said she.

At that moment a servant of the house brought in tea. She announced that Mr. Nicholson was down-stairs and would like to see Miss Holland.

"Very well. You'll stay?" Jane said to Brodrick.

He did. He was, Jane reflected, the sort of man who stayed.



"And he," she said, "has still a chance if—I fail you?"

"Here's Mr. Brodrick," said she, as Nicky entered. "He's going to make all our fortunes."

"His own, too, I hope," said Brodrick. But he looked sulky, as if he resented Nicholson's coming in.

"Of course," he said, "they tell me the whole thing's a dream, a delusion, that it won't pay. But I know how to make it pay. The reason why magazines go smash is because they're owned by men with no business connections, no business organization, no business capacity. I could n't do it if I had n't the 'Telegraph' at my back. Practically I make the paper pay for the magazine."

And he went into it, in his quick, quiet voice, expounding and expanding his scheme, laying it down fairly and squarely, with lucidity but no apparent ardour.

It was Nicky who was excited. Jane could see cupidity in Nicky's eyes as Brodrick talked about his magazine. Brodrick dwelt now on the commercial side of it which had no interest for Nicky. Yet Nicky was excited. He wanted badly to get into Brodrick's magazine, and Brodrick wanted, Brodrick was determined to keep him out. There was a brief struggle between Nicky's decency and his desire; and then Nicky's desire and Brodrick's determination fairly skirmished together in the open. Brodrick tried heavily to keep Nicky off it. But Nicky hovered airily, intangibly about it. He fanned it as with wings; when Brodrick dropped it he picked it up, he sustained it, he kept it flying high. Every movement intimated in Nicky's most exquisite manner that if Brodrick really meant it, if he had positively surrendered to the expensive dream, if he wanted, in short, to keep it up and keep it high, he could n't be off letting Nicky in.

Brodrick's shameless intention had been to out-stay Nicky. And as long as Nicky's approaches were so delicate as to provoke only delicate evasions, Brodrick stayed. But in the end poor Nicky turned desperate and put it to him point-blank. "Was there, or was there not to be a place for poets in the magazine?"

At that Brodrick got up and went.

"Nicky," said Jane, as the door closed on the retreating editor, "he came for my book, and I've made him take George Tanqueray's instead."

"I wish," said he, "you'd make him take my poems. But you can't. Nobody can *make* Brodrick do anything he does n't want to."

"Oh ——" said Jane, and dismissed Brodrick. "It's ages since I've seen you."

"I heard that you were immersed, and so I kept away."

"That was very good of you," said she.

It struck her when she had said it that perhaps it was not altogether what Nicky would have liked her to say.

"I *was* immersed," she said, "in Hambleby."

"Is he finished?"

"All but. I'm waiting to put a crown upon his head."

"Were you by any chance making it — the crown?"

"I have n't even begun to make it."

"I shan't spoil him then if I stay?"

"No. I doubt if anything could spoil him now."

"You've got him so safe?"

"So safe. And yet, Nicky, there are moments when I can hardly bear to think of Hambleby for fear he should n't be all right. It's almost as if he came too easily."

"He could n't. All my best things come," said Nicky "— like *that!*"

A furious sweep of Nicky's arm simulated the onrush of his inspiration.

"Oh, Nicky, how splendid it must be to be so certain."

"It is," said Nicky solemnly.

After all, it argued some divine compensation somewhere that a thing so destitute should remain unaware of its destitution, that a creature so futile and diminutive should be sustained by this conviction of his greatness. For he *was* certain. Nothing could annihilate the illusion by which Nicky lived. But it was enough to destroy all certainty in anybody else, and there were moments when the presence of Nicky had this shattering

effect on Jane. She could not have faced him until Hambleby was beyond his power to slay.

But Nicky, so far from enlarging on his certainty, meditated with his eyes fixed on the clock.

"You don't dine, do you," he said suddenly, "till half-past seven?"

"You'll stay, won't you?"

"I think I mustn't, thanks. I only wanted to know how long I had."

"You've really half-an-hour, if you *won't* dine."

"I say, you're not expecting anybody else?"

"I didn't expect Mr. Brodrick. I've kept everybody out so long that they've left off coming."

"I wonder," said he, still meditating, "if I've come too soon."

She held her breath. Nicky's voice was charged with a curious emotion.

"I knew," he went on, "it wasn't any use my coming as long as you were immersed. I would n't for worlds do anything that could possibly injure your career."

"Oh — my career —"

"The question is," he meditated, "would it?"

"Your coming, Nicky?"

"My not keeping away. I suppose I ought to be content to stand aside and watch it, your genius, when it's so tremendous. I've no right to get in its way —"

"You don't — you don't."

"I would n't. I always should be standing aside and watching. That," said Nicky, "would be, you see, my attitude."

"Dear Nicky," she murmured, "it's a beautiful attitude. It could n't — your attitude — be anything but beautiful."

"Only, of course," he added, "I'd be there."

"But you are. You are there. And it's delightful to have you."

His face, which had turned very white, flushed, but not with pleasure. It quivered with some sombre and sultry wave of pain.

"I meant," he said, "if I were always there."

His eyes searched her. She would not look at him.

"Nobody," she said, "can be — always."

"You would n't know it. You would n't see me — when you were immersed."

"I'm afraid," she said, "I always am, I always shall be — immersed."

"Won't there be moments?"

"Oh, moments! Very few."

"I would n't care how few there were," he said. "I know there can't be many."

She understood him. There was nothing on earth like Nicky's delicacy. He was telling her that he would accept any terms, the very lowest; that he knew how Tanqueray had impoverished her; that he could live on moments, the moments Tanqueray had left.

"There are none, Nicky. None," she said.

"I see this is n't one of them."

"All the moments — when there are any — will be more or less like this. I'm sorry," she said.

"So am I," said he. It was as if they were saying they were sorry he could not dine.

So monstrous was Nicky's capacity for illusion that he went away thinking he had given Jane up for the sake of her career.

And Jane tried to think of Nicky and be sorry for him. But she could n't. She was immoderately happy. She had given up Brodrick's magazine and Brodrick's money for Tanqueray's sake. Tanks would have his chance. He would be able to take a house, and then that little wife of his would n't have to sit with her hands before her, fretting her heart away because of Tanks. She was pleased, too, because she had made Brodrick do what he had n't meant and did n't want to do.

But as she lay in bed that night, not thinking of Brodrick, she saw suddenly Brodrick's eyes fixed on her with a look in them which she had not regarded at the time; and she heard him saying, in that queer, quiet voice of his, "I'm almost glad to have lost you this way."

"I wonder," she said to herself, "if he really spotted me."

XIX

BRODRICK'S house, Moor Grange, stood on the Roehampton side of Putney Heath, just discernible between the silver and green of the birches. With its queer, red-tiled roofs, pitched at every possible slope, white, rough-cast, many-cornered walls, green storm-shutters, lattice windows of many sorts and sizes, Brodrick's house had all the brilliant eccentricity of the twentieth century.

But Brodrick's garden was at least a hundred years older than his house. It had a beautiful green lawn with a lime-tree in the middle and a stone-flagged terrace at the back overlooking the north end of the Heath. Behind the house there was a kitchen garden that had survived modernity.

Brodrick's garden was kept very smooth and very straight, no impudent little flowers hanging out of their beds, no dissolute straggling of creepers upon walls. Even the sweet-peas at the back were trained to a perfect order and propriety.

And in Brodrick's house propriety and order were carried to the point of superstition. Nothing in that queer-cornered, modern exterior was ever out of place. No dust ever lay on floor or furniture. All the white-painted woodwork was exquisitely white. Time there was measured by a silver-chiming clock that struck the quiet hours with an infallible regularity.

And yet Brodrick was not a tidy nor a punctual man. In his library the spirit of order contended against fearful odds. For Brodrick lived in his library, the long, book-lined, up-stairs room that ran half the length of the house on the north side. But even there, violate as he would his own sanctuary, the indestructible propriety renewed itself by a diurnal miracle. He found books restored to their place, papers sorted, everything an editor could want lying ready to his hand. For the spirit of order rose punctually to perform its task.

But in the drawing-room its struggles and its triumph were complete.

It had been, so Brodrick's sisters told him, a man's idea of a drawing-room. And now there were feminine touches, so incongruous and scattered that they seemed the work of a person establishing herself tentatively, almost furtively, by small inconspicuous advances and instalments. A little work-table stood beside the low settle in the corner by the fireplace. Gay, shining chintz covered the ugly chairs. There were cushions here and there where a woman's back most needed them. Books, too, classics in slender duo-decimo bought for their cheapness, novels (from the circulating library), of the kind that Brodrick never read. On the top of a writing-table, flagrantly feminine in its appointments, there stood, well in sight of the low chair, a photograph of Brodrick which Brodrick could not possibly have framed and put there.

The woman who entered this room now had all the air of being its mistress; she moved in it so naturally and with such assurance, as in her sphere. You would have judged her occupied with some mysterious personal predilections with regard to drawing-rooms. She paused in her passage to reinstate some article dishonoured by the parlour-maid, to pat a cushion into shape and place a chair better to her liking. At each of these small fastidious operations she frowned like one who resents interference with the perfected system of her own arrangements.

She sat down at the writing-table and took from a pigeon-hole a sheaf of tradesmen's bills. These she checked and docketed conscientiously, after entering their totals in a book marked "Household." From all these acts she seemed to draw some secret enjoyment and satisfaction. Here she was evidently in a realm secure from the interference of the incompetent.

With a key attached to her person she now unlocked the inmost shrine of the writing-table. A small squat heap of silver and of copper sat there like the god of the shrine. She took it in her hand and counted it and restored it to its consecrated seat. She then made a final entry: "Cash in Hand, thirty-five shillings."

She sat smiling in tender contemplation of this legend. It stood for the savings of the last month, effected by her deft manipulation of the household. There was no suggestion of cupidity in her smile, nor any hint of economy adored and pursued for its own sake.

She was Gertrude Collett, the lady who for three years had acted as Brodrick's housekeeper, or, as she now preferred to call herself, his secretary. She had contrived, out of this poor material of his weekly bills, to fashion for herself a religion and an incorporeal romance.

She raised her face to the photograph of Brodrick, as if spiritually she rendered her account to him. And Brodrick's face, from the ledge of the writing-table, looked over Gertrude's head with an air of being unmoved by it all, with eyes intent on their own object.

She, Brodrick's secretary, might have been about five-and-thirty. She was fair with the fairness which is treacherous to women of her age, which suffers when they suffer. But Gertrude's skin still held the colours of her youth as some strong fabric holds its dye. Her face puzzled you; it was so broad across the cheek-bones that you would have judged it coarse; it narrowed suddenly in the jaws, pointing her chin to subtlety. Her nose, broad also across the nostrils and bridge, showed a sharp edge in profile; it was alert, competent, inquisitive. But there was mystery again in the long-drawn, pale-rose lines of her mouth. A wide mouth with irregular lips, not coarse, but coarsely finished. Its corners must once have drooped with pathos, but this tendency was overcome or corrected by the serene habit of her smile.

It was not the face of a dreamer. Yet at the moment you would have said she dreamed. Her eyes, light coloured, slightly prominent, stared unsheltered under their pale lashes and insufficient brows. They were eyes that at first sight had no depths in them. Yet they seemed to hold vapour. They dreamed. They showed her dream.

She started as the silver-chiming clock struck the quarter. She went up-stairs to the room that was her own, and exam-

ined herself carefully in the looking-glass. Then she did something to her hair. Waved slightly and kept in place by small amber-coloured combs, Gertrude's hair, though fragile, sustained the effect of her almost Scandinavian fairness. Next she changed her cotton blouse for an immaculate muslin one. As she drew down the blouse and smoothed it under the clipping belt, she showed a body flat in the back, sharp-breasted, curved in the waist; the body of a thoroughly competent, serviceable person. Her face now almost suggested prettiness, as she turned and turned its little tilted profile between two looking-glasses.

At half-past three she was seated in her place in Brodrick's library. A table was set apart for her and her typewriter on a corner by the window.

The editor was at work at his own table in the centre of the room. He did not look up at her as she came in. His eyes were lowered, fixed on the proof he was reading. Once, as he read, he shrugged his shoulders slightly, and once he sighed. Then he called her to him.

She rose and came, moving dreamily as if drawn, yet holding herself stiffly and aloof. He continued to gaze at the proof.

"You sat up half the night to correct this, I suppose?"

"Have I done it very badly?"

He did not tell her that she had, that he had spent the best part of his morning correcting her corrections. She was an inimitable housekeeper, and a really admirable secretary. But her weakness was that she desired to be considered admirable and inimitable in everything she undertook. It would distress her to know that this time she had not succeeded, and he did not like distressing people who were dependent on him. It used to be so easy, so mysteriously easy, to distress Miss Collett; but she had got over that; she was used to him now; she had settled down into the silent and serene performance of her duties. And she had brought to her secretarial work a silence and serenity that were invaluable to a man who detested argument and agitation.

So, instead of insisting on her failure, he tried to diminish

her disturbing sense of it; and when she inquired if she had done her work very badly, he smiled and said, No, she had done it much too well.

"Too well?" She flushed as she echoed him.

"Yes. You've corrected all Mr. Tanqueray's punctuation and nearly all his grammar."

"But it's all wrong. Look there — and there."

"How do you know it's all wrong?"

"But — it's so simple. There are rules."

"Yes. But Mr. Tanqueray's a great author, and great authors are born to break half the rules there are. What you and I have got to know is when they *may* break them, and when they may n't."

A liquid film swam over Gertrude's eyes, deepening their shallows. It was the first signal of distress.

"It's all right," he said. "I wanted you to do it. I wanted to see what you could do." He considered her quietly. "It struck me you might perhaps prefer it to your other duties."

"What made you think that?"

"I didn't think. I only wondered. Well —"

The next half-hour was occupied with the morning's correspondence, till Brodrick announced that they had no time for more.

"It's only just past four," she said.

"I know; but — Is there anything for tea?" He spoke vaguely like a man in a dream.

"What an opinion you have of my housekeeping," she said.

"Your housekeeping, Miss Collett, is perfection."

She flushed with pleasure, so that he kept it up.

"Everything," he said, "runs on greased wheels. I don't know how you do it."

"Oh, it's easy enough to do."

"And it does n't matter if a lady comes to tea?"

He took up a pencil and began to sharpen it.

"Is there," said Miss Collett, "a lady coming to tea?"

"Yes. And we'll have it in the garden. Tea, I mean."

"And who," said she, "is the lady?"

"Miss Jane Holland." Brodrick did not look up. He was absorbed in his pencil.

"Another author?"

"Another author," said Brodrick to his pencil.

She smiled. The editor's attitude to authors was one of prolonged amusement. Prodigious people, authors, in Brodrick's opinion. More than once, by way of relieving his somewhat perfunctory communion with Miss Collett, he had discussed the eccentricity, the vanity, the inexhaustible absurdity of authors. So that it was permissible for her to smile.

"You are not," he said, "expecting either of my sisters?"

He said it in his most casual, most uninterested voice. And yet she detected an undertone of anxiety. He did not want his sisters to be there when Miss Holland came. She had spent three years in studying his inflections and his wants.

"Not specially to-day," she said.

Brodrick became manifestly entangled in the process of his thought. The thought itself was as yet obscure to her. She inquired, therefore, where Miss Holland was to be "shown in." Was she a drawing-room author or a library author?

In the perfect and unspoken conventions of Brodrick's house the drawing-room was Miss Collett's place, and the library was his. Tea in the drawing-room meant that he desired Miss Collett's society; tea in the library that he preferred his own. There were also rules for the reception of visitors. Men were shown into the library and stayed there. Great journalistic ladies like Miss Caroline Bickersteth were shown into the drawing-room. Little journalistic ladies with dubious manners, calling, as they did, solely on business, were treated as men and confined strictly to the library.

Brodrick's stare of surprise showed Gertrude that she had blundered. He had a superstitious reverence for those authors who, like Mr. Tanqueray, were great.

"My dear Miss Collett, do you know who she is? The drawing-room, of course, and all possible honour."

She laughed. She had cultivated for Brodrick's sake the art of laughter, and prided herself upon knowing the precise moments to be gay.

"I see," she said. And yet she did not see. How could there be any honour if he did not want his sisters to be there? "That means the best tea-service and my best manners?"

He did n't know, he said, that she had any but the best.

How good they were she let him see when he presented Miss Holland on her arrival, her trailing, conspicuous arrival. Gertrude had never given him occasion to feel that his guests could have a more efficient hostess than his secretary. She spoke of the pleasure it gave her to see Miss Holland, and of the honour that she felt, and of how she had heard of Miss Holland from Mr. Brodrick. There was no becoming thing that Gertrude did not say. And all the time she was aware of Brodrick's eyes fixed on Miss Holland with that curious lack of diffuseness in their vision.

Brodrick was carrying it off by explaining Gertrude to Miss Holland.

"Miss Collett," he said, "is a wonderful lady. She's always doing the most beautiful things, so quietly that you never knew they're done."

"Does anybody," said Jane, "know how the really beautiful things are done?"

"There's a really beautiful tea," said Miss Collett gaily, "in the garden. There are scones and the kind of cake you like."

"You see," Brodrick said, "how she spoils me, how I lie on roses."

"You'd better come," said Miss Collett, "while the scones are still hot."

"While," said Jane, "the roses are still fresh."

He held the door open for her, and on the threshold she turned to Miss Collett who followed her.

"Are you sure," said she, "that he's the horrid Sybarite you think him?"

"I am," said Brodrick, "whatever Miss Collett thinks me. If it pleases her to think I'm a Sybarite I've got to *be* a Sybarite."

"I see. And when the rose-leaves are crumpled you bring them to Miss Collett, and she irons them out, and makes them all smooth again, so that you don't know they're the same rose-leaves?"

"The rose-leaves never are crumpled."

"Except by some sudden, unconsidered movement of your own?"

"My movements," said Brodrick, "are never sudden and unconsidered."

"What? Never?"

Miss Collett looked a little surprised at this light-handed treatment of the editor.

And Jane observed Brodrick with a new interest as they sat there in the garden and Miss Collett poured out tea. "Mr. Brodrick," she said to herself, "is going to marry Miss Collett, though he does n't know it."

By the end of the afternoon it seemed to her an inevitable consummation, the marriage of Mr. Brodrick and Miss Collett. She could almost see it working, the predestined attraction of the eternally compatible, the incomparably fit. And when Brodrick left off taking any notice of Miss Collett, and finally lured Jane away into the library on the flimsiest pretence, she wondered what game he was up to. Perhaps in his innocence he was blind to Miss Collett's adoration. He was not sure of Miss Collett. He was trying to draw her.

Jane, intensely interested, advanced from theory to theory of Brodrick and Miss Collett while Brodrick removed himself to the writing-table, and turned on her a mysterious back.

"I want to show you something," he said.

She went to him. In the bared centre of the writing-table he had placed a great pile of manuscript. He drew out his chair for her, so that she could sit down and look well at the wonder.

Her heart leaped to the handwriting and to George Tanqueray's name on the title-page.

"You've seen it?" he said.

"No. Mr. Tanqueray never shows his work."

From some lair in the back of the desk he swept forward a prodigious array of galley proofs. Tanqueray's novel was in the first number of the "Monthly Review."

"Oh!" she cried, looking up at him.

"I've pleased you?" he said.

"You have pleased me very much."

She rose and turned away, overcome as by some desired and unexpected joy. He followed her, making a cushioned place for her in the chair by the hearth, and seated himself opposite her.

"I was very glad to do it," he said simply.

"It will do you more good than Hambleby," she said.

"You know I did not think so," said he. And there was a pause between them.

"Mr. Brodrick," she said presently, "do you really want a serial from me?"

"Do I want it!"

"As much as you think you do?"

"I always," said he, "want things as much as I think I do."

She smiled, wondering whether he thought he wanted Miss Collett as much as he obviously did.

"What?" he said. "Are you going to let me have the next?"

"I had thought of it. If you really do ——"

"Have you had any other offers?"

"Yes; several. But ——"

"You must remember mine is only a new venture. And you may do better ——"

It was odd, but a curious uncertainty, a modesty had come upon him since she last met him. He had been then so absurd, so arrogant about his magazine.

"I don't want to do better."

"Of course, if it's only a question of terms ——"

It was incredible, Brodrick's depreciating himself to a mere question of terms. She flushed at this dreadful thought.

"It is n't," she said. "Oh! I did n't mean *that*."

"You never mean that. Which is why I must think of it for you. I can at least offer you higher terms."

"But," she persisted, "I should hate to take them. I *want* you to have the thing. That's to say I want *you* to have it. You must not go paying me more for that."

"I see," he said, "you want to make up."

She looked at him. He was smiling complacently, in the fulness of his understanding of her.

"My dear Miss Holland," he went on, "there must be no making up. Nothing of that sort between you and me."

"There is n't," she said. "What is there to make up for? For your not getting me?"

He smiled again as if that idea amused him.

"Or," said she, "for my making you take Mr. Tanqueray?"

"You did n't *make* me," he said. "I took him to please you."

"Well," she said; "and you'll take me now, to please me."

She rose.

"I must say good-bye to Miss Collett. How nice," she said, "Miss Collett is."

"Is n't she?" said he.

He saw her politely to the station.

That evening he drank his coffee politely in the drawing-room with Miss Collett.

"Do you know," he said, "Miss Holland thinks you're nice."

To his wonder Miss Collett did not look as if the information gave her any joy.

"Did she say so?"

"Yes. Do you think *her* nice?"

"Of course I do."

"What," said he, "do you really think of her?" He was in the habit of asking Miss Collett what she thought of people.

It interested him to know what women thought, especially what they thought of other women.

It was in the spirit of their old discussions that she now replied.

"You can see she is a great genius. They say geniuses are bad to live with. But I do not think she would be."

He did not answer. He was considering very profoundly the question she had raised.

Which was precisely what Miss Collett meant that he should do.

As the silver-chiming clock struck ten she rose and said good-night. She never allowed these sittings to be prolonged past ten. Neither did Brodrick.

"And I am not to read any more proofs?" she said.

"Do you like reading them?"

She smiled. "It's not because I like it. I simply wanted to save you."

"You do save me most things."

"I try," she said sweetly, "to save you all."

He smiled now. "There are limits," he said, "even to your power of saving me. And to my capacity for being saved."

The words were charged with a significance that Brodrick himself was not aware of; as if the powers that worked in him obscurely had used him for the utterance of a divination not his own.

His secretary understood him better than he did himself. She had spent three years in understanding him. And now, for the first time in three years, her lucidity was painful.

She could not contemplate serenely the thing she thought she had seen. Therefore she drew a veil over it and refused to believe that it was there.

"He did not mean anything," said Gertrude to herself. "He is not the sort of man who means things." Which was true.

XX

BRODRICK, living on Putney Heath, was surrounded by his family. It was only fifteen minutes' walk from his front door to his brother John's house in Augustus Road, Wimbledon; only five minutes from his back door to Henry's house in Roehampton Lane. You went by a narrow foot-track down the slope to get to Henry. You crossed the Heath by Wimbledon Common to get to John. If John and Henry wanted to get to each other, they had to pass by Brodrick's house.

Moor Grange was a half-way house, the great meeting-place of all the Brodricks.

One fine warm Sunday in mid-May, about four o'clock, all the Brodricks except Hugh were assembled on Hugh's lawn. There was Mr. John Brodrick, the eldest brother, the head of the firm of Brodrick and Brodrick, Electrical Engineers. There was Dr. Henry Brodrick, who came next to John. He had brought Mrs. Heron, their sister (Mrs. Heron lived with Henry, because Mr. Heron had run away with the governess, to the unspeakable scandal of the Brodricks). There was Mrs. Louis Levine, who came next to Mrs. Heron. There was Mrs. John Brodrick, not to be separated from her husband, who, in a decorous dumbness and secrecy, adored her; and Mr. Louis Levine, who owed his position among the Brodricks to the very properly apparent devotion of his wife.

And there were children about. Eddy and Winny Heron, restless, irrepressible in their young teens, sprawled at their mother's feet and hung over her in attitudes of affection. One very small Levine trotted to and fro on fat legs over the lawn. The other, too small to run, could be seen in the background, standing in Gertrude Collett's lap and trampling on her.

The Levines had come over from St. John's Wood, packed

tight in their commodious brand-new motor-car, the symbol of Levine's prosperity. So that all Brodrick's family were at Putney this afternoon.

They were sitting in the delicate shadow of the lime-tree. Outside, the lawn was drenched with light, light that ran quivering into the little inlets and pools among the shadows. The cropped grass shone clear as emerald, and all the garden showed clear-cut and solid and stable in its propriety and order.

Still more distinct, more stable and more solid, more ineradicably fixed in order and propriety, were the four figures of the Brodricks. Sitting there, in a light that refused, in spite of the lime-tree, to lend itself to any mystery or enchantment, they maintained themselves in a positively formidable reality. All these Brodricks had firm, thick-skinned faces in which lines came slowly, and were few but strong. Faces, they were, of men who have lived in absolute sobriety and sanity, untorn by any temptation to live otherwise; faces of women to whom motherhood has brought the ultimate content.

Comfortably material persons, sitting in a deep peace, not to be rapt from it by any fantasy, nor beguiled by any dream, they paid only in a high morality their debt to the intangible.

This afternoon, in spite of themselves, they were roused somewhat from the peace they sat in. They were expecting somebody.

"I suppose, when she arrives, we shall all have to sit at the lady's feet," said Mrs. Levine.

"I've no objection," said the Doctor; "after what she's done."

"It was pretty decent of her," said Levine. He was dark, nervous and solemn-eyed, a lean man of his race, and handsome. Sophy Brodrick had not loved her husband when she married him. She adored him now, because of the beauty that had passed from him into her children.

"I say, Uncle Louis, you *might* tell me what she *did* do," said Eddy Heron.

"She got your Uncle Hughy out of a tight place, my boy."

"I say, what's *he* been doing?"

Mr. Levine smiled inscrutably, while his wife shook her head at him.

"He's been going it, has he? Good old Uncle Hughy!"

Eddy's mother thought it would be nice if he and Winny went down the Heath road to meet Uncle Hughy and Miss Holland. Whereupon Eddy embraced his mother, being unable to agree with her.

"You really believe," said Mr. John Brodrick, who seemed anxious to be sure of his facts before he committed himself, "you really believe that if it had not been for this lady he'd have had to give it up?"

"Well," said Levine judicially, "she practically saved it. You see he *would* start it with George Tanqueray. And who cares about George Tanqueray? That's what wrecked him. I told him at the time it was sheer lunacy, but he would n't listen to me. *Why*" (Levine spoke in a small excited voice with sudden high notes), "he had n't subscriptions enough to float the thing for twenty-four hours. As soon as he gets Miss Holland they go up by leaps and bounds, and it's bin goin' steady ever since. How long it'll keep goin' 's another thing."

"I understood Hugh to say," said John, "that the arrangements involved some considerable sacrifice to the lady."

"Well, you see, he'd been a bit of an ass. He'd made her a ridiculous offer, an offer *we* simply could n't afford, and we had to tell her so."

"And then," said Sophy, "you might as well mention that she gave it him for what you *could* afford."

"She certainly let him have it very cheap." He ruminated. "Uncommonly cheap — considering what her figure is."

Eddy wanted to know what Miss Holland's figure had to do with his Uncle Hughy. Winny, round-eyed with wonder, inquired if it was beautiful, and was told that it was fairly beautiful, a tidy figure, a nice round figure, like her Aunt Sophy's.

"That," said John, "was *very* decent of her."

"Very," said the gentle lady, Mrs. John.

"It was splendid," said Mrs. Heron.

The Doctor meditated. "I wonder *why* she did it," said the Doctor.

His brother-in-law explained. "Oh, she thought she'd let him in for Tanqueray."

"Let him *in*?"

"Don't you see," said Mrs. Heron, "it was her idea of honour."

"A woman's idea of honour," said the Doctor.

"You need n't criticize it," said his sister Sophy.

"I don't," said the Doctor.

"I can tell you," said Levine, "what with her idea of honour and Hugh's idea of honour, the office had a pretty rough time of it till they got the business fixed."

"With Hugh's *ideas*," said John, "he's hardly likely to make this thing pay, is he? Especially if he's going to bar politics."

He said it importantly. By a manner, by wearing spectacles, and brushing his hair back in two semi-circles from his forehead, Mr. John Brodrick contrived to appear considerably more important than he was.

"Ah, he's made a mistake there," said the Doctor.

"That's what *I* tell him." Levine was more excited than ever.

"I should think he might be allowed to do what he likes," said Sophy. "After all, it's *his* magazine."

Mr. Levine's face remained supernaturally polite while it guarded his opinion that it wasn't his brother-in-law's magazine at all. They had disagreed about Tanqueray. They had disagreed about everything connected with the magazine, from the make-up of the first number to the salary of the sub-editor. They had almost quarreled about what Levine called "Miss Holland's price." And now, when his wife said that it was Sunday — and if they were going to talk business all the afternoon — she was told that Hugh's magazine wasn't business. It was Hugh's game. (His dreadfully expensive, possibly ruinous game.)

"Then," she said, "you might let him play it. I'm sure he works hard enough on your horrid old 'Telegraph.'"

Sophy invariably stood up for her family against her husband. But she would have stood up for her husband against all the world.

"Thank you, my pet." She stooped to the little three-year-old girl who trotted to and fro, offering to each of these mysteriously, deplorably preoccupied persons a flower without a stalk.

It was at this moment that Brodrick arrived from the station with Miss Holland.

"Is it a garden-party?" Jane inquired.

"No," said Brodrick, "it's my family."

She came on with him over the lawn. And the group rose to its feet; it broke up with little movements and murmurs, in a restrained, dignified expectancy. Jane had the sense of being led towards some unaccountable triumph and acclamation.

They closed round her, these unknown Brodricks, inaudibly stirred, with some unspoken, incomprehensible emotion in the men's gaze and in the women's touch. The big boy and girl shared it as they came forward in their shyness, with affectionate faces and clumsy, abortive encounters of the hand.

It was the whole Brodrick family moved to its depths, feeling as one. It could only be so moved by the spectacle of integrity and honour and incorruptible loyalty to It.

Still moved, it was surrounding Jane when a maid arrived with the tea-table, and the white cloth waved a signal to Miss Collett across the lawn. There was then a perceptible pause in the ovation as Brodrick's secretary appeared.

Even across the lawn Jane could discern trouble in Miss Collett's face. But Miss Collett's face was plastic in readjustments, and by the time she was fairly on the scene it had recaptured the habit of its smile. The smile, in greeting, covered and carried off the betraying reluctance of her hand. It implied that, if Miss Holland was to be set up in a high place and worshipped, Miss Collett was anxious to observe the appropriate

ritual. Having observed it, she took, with her quiet, inconspicuous assurance, the place that was her own. She gave but one sign of her trouble when Dr. Brodrick was heard congratulating their guest on the great serial which, said he, by "saving" the magazine, had "saved" his brother. Then Gertrude quivered slightly, and the blood flushed in her set face and passed as fierce heat passes through iron.

While they were talking Jane had opportunity to watch and wonder at the firm, consolidated society that was Brodrick's family. These faces proclaimed by their resemblance the material link. Mr. John Brodrick was a more thick-set, an older, graver-lined, and grizzled Hugh, a Hugh who had lost his sombre fixity of gaze. Dr. Henry Brodrick was a tall, attenuated John, with a slightly, ever so slightly receding chin. Mrs. Heron was Hugh again made feminine and slender. She had Hugh's features, refined and diminished. She had Hugh's eyes, filled with some tragic sorrow of her own. Her hair was white, every thread of it, though she could not have been more than forty-five.

These likenesses were not so apparent at first sight in Mrs. Levine, the golden, full-blown flower of the Brodricks. They had mixed so thoroughly and subtly that they merged in her smoothness and her roundness. And still the facial substance showed in the firm opacity of her skin, the racial soul asserted itself in her poised complacency and decision.

"You don't know," she was saying, "how we're all sitting at your feet."

"We are indeed," said Mr. John Brodrick.

"Very much so," said the Doctor.

"Even little Cissy," said Hugh.

For little Cissy was bringing all her stalkless flowers to Jane; smiling at her as if she alone possessed the secret of this play. Brodrick watched, well-pleased, the silent traffic of their tender-nesses.

The others were talking about Hambleby now. They had all read him. They had all enjoyed him. They all wanted more of him.

"If we could only have had Hambleby, Miss Holland," said Levine. "It was n't my fault that we did n't get him."

Jane remembered that this was the brother-in-law whom Brodrick had wanted to keep out. He had the air of being persistently, permanently in.

"Of course it was n't your fault," said she.

Levine then thought it necessary to say things about Jane's celebrity till Brodrick cut him short.

"Miss Holland," he said, "does n't like her celebrity. You need n't talk about it."

John and Henry looked graver than ever, and Sophy made sweet eyes at Jane. Sophy's eyes—when they looked at you—were very sweet. It was through her eyes only that she apologized for her husband, whose own eyes were manifestly incapable of apologizing for anything. The Brodricks seemed to tolerate their brother-in-law; and he seemed, more sublimely, to tolerate their tolerance.

Great efforts were now made to divert Levine from the magazine. Mr. John Brodrick headed him off with motors and their makers; the Doctor kept his half-resentful spirit moving briskly round the Wimbledon golf-links; and Hugh, with considerable dexterity, landed him securely on the fiscal question, where he might be relied upon to stay.

But it was the Baby who saw what was to be done if his parent was to be delivered from his own offensiveness.

"Oh, look!" cried Winny. "Look at Baby. Making such a ducky angel of himself."

The Baby, having sat down abruptly on the grass, was making a ducky angel of himself by wriggling along it, obliquely, as he sat.

At the sight of him all the Brodricks instantaneously lost their seriousness and sanity. He was captured and established as the centre of the group. And, in the great act of adoration of the Baby, Levine was once more united to his wife's family.

His wife's family, like his wife, could forgive anything to Louis Levine because of the babies. It reserved its disapproval

for Mrs. John Brodrick who had never had any; who had never done anything that was expected of her. Mrs. John looked as if she had cried a great deal because of the things she had not done. She had small hazel eyes with inflamed lids, and a small high nose that was always rather red. She was well born, and she carried her low-browed, bird-like head among the Brodricks with a solitary grace, and the motions of a dignified, distinguished bird.

And now, in mute penitence and wistful worship, she prostrated herself before their divinity, the Baby.

And in the middle of it all, with amazing smiles and chuckles, the Baby suddenly renounced his family and held out his arms to Jane. And suddenly all the Brodricks laughed. His mother laughed more than any of them. She took the Baby, and set him at Jane's feet; and he sat there, looking at Jane, as at some object of extraordinary interest and wonder and fascination. And Brodrick looked at both of them with something of the same naïf expression, and the Doctor, the attenuated, meditative Doctor, looked at all three, but especially at his brother. Gertrude Collett looked, now at Brodrick and now at Jane.

Brodrick did not see the Doctor or Gertrude either. It had just struck him that Jane was not in the least like her portrait, *the* portrait. He was thinking, as Tanqueray had once thought, that Gisborne, R.A., was an ass, and that if he could have her painted he would have her painted as she looked now.

As he was trying to catch the look, Gertrude came and said it was the Baby's tea-time, and carried him away. And the look went from Jane's face, and Brodrick felt annoyed with Gertrude because she had made it go.

Then Mrs. John came up and tried very hard to talk to Jane. She was nervously aware that conversation was expected of her as the wife of the head of the family, and that in this thing also she had failed him. She was further oppressed by Miss Holland's celebrity, and by the idea she had that Miss Holland must be always thinking of it and would not like to see it thus obscured by any other interest.

And while Mrs. John sat beside her, painfully and pensively endeavouring to converse, Jane heard Brodrick talking to Mrs. Levine.

"Where 's Gertrude gone?" he said.

And Mrs. Levine answered, "She's indoors with the children."

Mrs. John was saying that Miss Holland must have known Hambleby; and then again that no, that was n't likely. That was what made it so wonderful that she should know. Mrs. John could not have done it. She recounted sorrowfully the number of things she could not do. And through it all Jane heard the others talking about Gertrude.

"Gertrude looks very ill," said Mrs. Levine. "What's the matter with her?"

"How should I know?" said Brodrick. "Ask Henry."

"Miss Collett," said the Doctor solemnly, "has not consulted me."

At this point Mrs. Heron delivered Jane from Mrs. John. She said she wanted Miss Holland to see the sweet-peas in the kitchen garden.

And in the kitchen garden, among the sweet-peas, Mrs. Heron thanked Jane on her own account for what she had done, while Jane kept on saying that she had done nothing. All down the kitchen garden there was an alley of sweet-peas with a seat at the end of it, and there they sat while Mrs. Heron talked about her brother Hugh who had been so good to her and to her children. This praise of Brodrick mingled with the scent of the sweet-peas, so that Jane could never again smell sweet-peas in a hot garden without hearing Brodrick's praise.

Mrs. Heron stopped abruptly, as if she could say no more, as if, indeed, she had said too much, as if she were not used to saying such things.

"My brother thinks I may ask you to come and see me. Will you? Will you come some day and stay with me?"

In spite of the voice that told her that she was being drawn, that this family of Brodrick's was formidable, that she must be on her guard against all arms stretched out to her, before she

knew what she was doing Jane had said, Yes; she would be very glad.

Voices came to them then, and down the long alley between the sweet-peas she saw Brodrick coming towards them with Miss Collett and Winny Heron; and Jane was suddenly aware that it was getting late.

It was cold, too. She shivered. Miss Collett offered a wrap.

For a moment, in the hall of the house, Jane was alone with Brodrick's secretary. Through the open door they could see Brodrick standing on the lawn, talking to his sister. Mrs. Heron held him by one arm, Winny dragged on the other.

"Those two seem devoted to Mr. Brodrick," said Jane.

"They ought to be," said Miss Collett, "with all he does for them. And they are. The Brodricks are all like that." She looked hard at Jane. "If you've done anything for them, they never forget it. They keep on paying back."

Jane smiled.

"I imagine Mr. Hugh Brodrick would be quite absurd about it."

"Oh, *he* ——" Gertrude raised her head. Her eyes adored him.

As if her pause were too profoundly revealing, she filled it up. "He'll always give more than he gets. It isn't for *you* he gives, it's for himself. He likes giving. And when it comes to paying him back ——"

"That's where he has you?"

"Yes."

And Jane thought, "My dear lady, if you would n't treat him quite so like a god, he might have a chance to discover that he's mortal."

She would have liked to have said that to Miss Collett. She would have liked to have taken Brodrick to the seat at the end of the alley and have said to him. "It's all perfectly right. Don't be an idiot and miss it. You can't do a better thing for yourself than marry her, and it's the only way, you know, you can pay her back. Don't you see that you're cruel to her? That it's you that's making her ill? She can't look pretty when

she's ill, but she'd be quite pretty if you made her happy."

But all she said was, "He's like that, is he?" And she went out to where he waited for her.

"Have you *got* to go?" he said.

She said, Yes, she was half expecting Nina Lempriere.

"The fiery lady?"

"Yes."

"You may as well stay. She won't be there," said Brodrick.

But Jane did not stay.

The whole family turned out on to the Heath to see them go. At the end of the road they looked back and saw it there. Sophy Levine was holding up the Baby to make him wave to Jane.

"Why did you tell them?" she said reproachfully to Brodrick.

"Because I wanted them to like you."

"Am I so disagreeable that they could n't — without that?"

"I wanted you," he said, "to like *them*."

"I do like them."

He glanced at her sidelong and softly.

"Tell me," she said. "What have they done to look so happy, and so perfectly at peace?"

"That's it. They have n't done anything."

"Not to do things — that's the secret, is it?"

"Yes," he said, "I almost think it is."

"I wonder," said she.

XXI

BRODRICK was right. Nina was not there. At the moment when Jane arrived, anxious and expectant, in Kensington Square, Nina and Tanqueray were sitting by the window of the room in Adelphi Terrace.

They were both silent, both immobile in the same attitude, bowed forward, listening intently, the antagonistic pair made one in their enchantment, their absorption.

A young man stood before Tanqueray. He stood a little behind Nina where she sat in the window-seat. One shoulder leaned beside her against the shutter. He was very tall, and as he stood there his voice, deep and rhythmic, flowed and vibrated above them, giving utterance to the thing that held them.

Nina could not see him where she sat. It was Tanqueray who kept on looking at him with clear, contemplative eyes under brows no longer irritable.

He was, Tanqueray thought, rather extraordinary to look at. Dressed in a loosely-fitting suit of all seasons, he held himself very straight from the waist, as if in defiance of the slackness of his build. His eyes, his alien, star-gazing eyes, were blue and uncannily clear under their dark and delicate brows. He had the face of a Celt, with high cheek-bones, and a short high nose; the bone between the nostrils, slightly prominent like a buttress, saved the bridge of it from the final droop. He had the wide mouth of a Celt, long-lipped, but beautifully cut. His thick hair, his moustache, his close-clipped, pointed beard, were dark and dry. His face showed a sunburn whitening. It had passed through strange climates. He had the look, this poet, of a man who had left some stupendous experience behind him; who had left many things behind him, to stride, star-gazing, on. His face revealed him as he chanted his poems. Unbeautiful in detail, its effect as a whole was one of extraordinary beauty, as of

some marvellously pure vessel for the spiritual fire. Beside him it struck Tanqueray that Nina showed more than ever a murky flame.

The voice ceased, but the two remained silent for a moment.

Then Tanqueray spoke one word, "Splendid!"

Nina turned her head and looked up at the poet. His eyes were still following his vision. Her voice recalled him.

"Owen," she said, "will you bring the rest? Bring down all you've got."

Tanqueray saw as she spoke to him that there came again that betraying tenderness about her mouth; as she looked at him, her eyes lifted their hoods, revealing the sudden softness and surrender.

And as Tanqueray watched her he was aware that the queer eyes of the man were turned on him, rather than on Nina. They looked through him, as if they saw with a lucidity even more unendurable than his, what was going on in Tanqueray's soul.

He said something inaudible to Nina and went out of the room with a light, energetic stride.

"How can you stand his eyes?" said Tanqueray; "it's like being exposed to the everlasting stare of God."

"It is, rather."

"What's his name again?"

"Owen Prothero."

"What do you know about him?"

She told him what she knew. Prothero was, as Tanqueray saw, an unlicked Celt. He had been, if Tanqueray would believe it, in the Indian Medical Service, and had flung it up before he got his pension. He had been to British Central Africa on a commission for investigating sleeping sickness; he spoke of it casually as if it were the sort of thing you naturally were on. He had volunteered as a surgeon in the Boer War. And with it all he was what Tanqueray saw.

"And his address?" Tanqueray inquired.

"He lives here."

"Why should n't he?" He answered her challenging eyes. They shot light at him.

"He is a great poet? I *was* right?"

"Absolutely. He's great enough for anybody. How on earth did you get hold of him?"

She was silent. She seemed to be listening for the sound of Prothero's feet on the stair.

He was soon with them, bringing his sheaf of manuscript. He had brought all he had got. The chanting began again and continued till the light failed.

And as Tanqueray listened the restless, irritable devilry passed from his face. Salient, thrust forward toward Prothero, it was the face of a winged creature in adoration, caught suddenly into heaven, breasting the flood of the supernal light. For Tanqueray could be cruel in his contempt for all clevernesses and littlenesses, for all achievements that had the literary taint; but he was on his knees in a moment before the incorruptible divinities. He had the immortal's scent for immortality.

When the chanting ceased they talked.

Tanqueray warned Prothero of the horrors of premature renown. Prothero declared that he had none. Nobody knew his name.

"Good," said Tanqueray. "Celebrity's all very well at the end, when you've done the things you want to do. It's a bad beginning. It does n't matter quite so much if you live in the country where nobody's likely to know you're celebrated till you're dead. But if you *will* live in London, your only chance is to remain obscure."

"There are in London at this moment," he continued, "about one thousand celebrated authors. There are, I imagine, about fifty distinct circles where they meet. Fifty distinct hells where they're bound to meet each other. Hells where they're driven round and round, meeting each other. Steaming hells where they sit stewing in each other's sweat——"

"*Don't*, George!" cried Nina.

"Loathsome hells, where they swarm and squirm and wriggle

in and out of each other. Sanguinary, murderous hells, where they're all tearing at each other's throats. How can you hope, how can you possibly hope to do anything original, if you're constantly breathing that atmosphere? Horrid used-up air that authors—beasts!—have breathed over and over and over again."

"As if," said Nina, "*we* were n't authors."

"My dear Nina, nobody would think it of us. Nobody would have thought it of Jinny if she had n't gone and got celebrated."

"You'll be celebrated yourself some day."

"I shall be dead," said he. "I shan't know anything about it."

At this point Prothero, with an exquisite vagueness, stated that he wanted to get work on a paper. He was not, he intimated, looking to his poems to keep him. On the contrary, he would have to keep them.

Tanqueray wondered if he realized how disastrous, how ruinous they were. He had no doubt about Nina's poet. But there were poets and poets. There were dubious, delicate splendours, for ever trembling on the verge of immortality. And there were the infrequent, enormous stars that wheel on immeasurable orbits, so distant that they seem of all transitory things most transitory. Prothero was one of these. There was not much chance for him in his generation. His poems were too portentously inspired. They were the poems of a saint, a seer, an exile from life and time. He stood alone on the ultimate, untrodden shores, watching strange tides and the courses of unknown worlds. On any reasonable calculation he could not hope to make himself heard for half a century, if then. There was something about him alien and terrible, inaccessibly divine. The form of his poems was uncouth, almost ugly. Their harmonies, stupendous and unforeseen, struck the ear with the shock of discord.

It was, of course, absurd that he should want work on a paper; still more absurd that he should think, or that Nina should think, that Tanqueray could get it for him.

He did n't, it appeared, expect anybody to get it for him. He

just wrote things, things that he thought were adequately imbecile, and shot them into letter-boxes. As to what became of them, Tanqueray had never seen anybody more unsolicitous, more reckless of the dark event.

He went away with Prothero's poems in his pocket.

Nina followed him and held him on the doorstep.

"You do believe in him?" she said.

"What's the good of *my* believing in him? I can't help him. I can't help myself. He's got to wait, Nina, like the rest of us. It won't hurt him."

"It will. He can't wait, George. He's desperately poor. You must do something."

"What can I do?"

"There are things," she said, "that people always do."

"I could offer him a five-pound note; but he would n't take it."

"No. He would n't take it. You can do better than that. You can get him to meet that man of yours."

"What man?"

"That magazine man, Brodrick."

He laughed. "Considering that I all but did for him and his magazine! Brodrick's Jane Holland's man, not mine, you know. Have you told Jane about Prothero?"

"No."

A faint flame leaped in her face and died.

"You'd better," he said. "She can do anything with Brodrick. She could even make him take a poem. Why did n't you ask Prothero to meet her?"

"I have n't seen her for six months."

"Is that your fault or hers?"

"Neither."

"He's had to wait, then, six months?"

There was no escaping his diabolical lucidity.

"Go and see her at once," he went on, "and take Prothero. That's more to the point, you know, than his seeing me. Jinny is a powerful person, and then she has a way with her."

Again the flame leaped in her face and died, slowly, as under torture.

"Even Laura can do more for him than I. She knows people on papers. Take him to see Laura." He was backing out of the doorway.

"It was you," she said, "that he wanted to see. I promised him."

Her face, haggard, restless with the quivering of her agonized nerves, was as a wild book for him to read. He was sorry for her torture. He lingered.

"I'd go and speak to Brodrick to-morrow, only he loathes the sight of me, and I can't blame him, poor devil."

"It's no matter," she said. "I'll write to Jane Holland."

"Do. She'll get him work on Brodrick's paper."

He went away, meditating on Nina and her medical, surgical poet. She would have to write to Jinny now. But she would n't take him to see her. She was determined to keep him to herself. That was why none of them had seen anything of Nina for six months. There was (he came back to it again) something very murky about Nina. And Nina, with her murkiness, was manifestly in love with this spiritual, this mystical young man. So amazing was the part set her in the mortal comedy. He would give a good deal to know what Prothero thought of Nina.

Prothero could have told him that he thought of Nina as he thought of his own youth.

He was of her mother's race and from her country of the Marches. He knew more about Nina than Tanqueray had ever known. He knew the Lemprieres, a family of untamed hereditary wildness. He knew Nina as the survival of a hereditary doom, a tragedy untiring, relentless, repeated year after year and foreseen with a terrible certainty. He knew that it had left her with her bare genius, her temperament and her nerves.

It was of all things most improbable that he should be here in London, lodged in one room, with only the bare boards of it between him and Nina Lempriere.

The improbability of it struck Nina as she went to and fro in the inner room, preparing their supper.

There had been no acquaintance between her and young Prothero, the medical student. If their ways met it was only by accident, at long intervals, and always, she remembered, out of doors, on her mountains. They used to pass each other with eyes unseeing, fixed in their own dream. That was fifteen years ago. In all that time she had not seen him.

He had drawn her now by his shyness, his horror of other people, his perfect satisfaction in their solitary communion. Virgin from his wild places, he had told her that she was the only woman he was not afraid of. He had attached himself to her manifestly, persistently, with the fidelity of a wild thing won by sheer absence of pursuit. She had let him come and go, violently aware of him, but seeming unaware. He would sit for hours in her room, reading while she wrote, forgetting that upstairs his fire was dying in the grate.

He had embraced Poverty like a saint. He regarded it as the blessed state of every man who desired to obey his own genius at all costs. He was all right, he said. He had lived on rice in the jungle. He could live on rice at a pinch now. And he could publish his poems if he got work on the papers. On this point Nina found him engagingly, innocently open to suggestion. She had suggested a series of articles on the problem of the East. He had written the articles, but in such a style and in such a spirit that no editor had as yet dared to publish them.

It was possible that he would have a chance with Brodrick who was braver than other editors. Brodrick was his one chance.

She would have suggested his meeting Brodrick, but that the way to Brodrick lay through Jane Holland. She remembered that the gods had thrust Jane Holland between her and George Tanqueray; and she was determined that they should put no woman between her and Owen Prothero. She had taken possession of him and she meant to keep him to herself. The supreme, irresistible temptation was to keep him to herself. It

dominated her desire to serve his interests. But she had not refused him when he owned, shyly, that he would like to see George Tanqueray, the only living writer, he maintained, who had any passion for truth, any sweep, any clearness of vision.

It was Tanqueray, with that passion, that diabolical lucidity, that vision of his, who had made her realize the baseness of her secrecy. She had no right to keep Owen to herself. He was too valuable.

His innocence had given a sting to her remorse. He had remained so completely satisfied with what she had done for him, so wholly unaware of having been kept obscure when celebrity was possible. Things came, he seemed to say, or they did n't come. If you were wise you waited.

With his invincible patience he was waiting now, in her room up-stairs, standing before the bookcase with his back to the door. He stood absolutely still, his head and shoulders bowed over the book he was manifestly not reading. In this attitude he had an air of masterly indifference to time, of not caring how long he waited, being habituated to extravagant expenditure of moments and of days. Absorbed in some inward and invisible act, he was unaware of Nina as she entered.

She called him to the supper she had made ready for him. He swung round, returning as it were from an immense distance, and followed her.

He was hungry, and she had a fierce maternal joy in seeing him eat. It was after supper that they talked, as they sat by the window in the outer room, looking at the river, a river of night, lamp-starred.

Nina began it. "Owen," she said, "how did George Tanqueray strike you?"

He paused before he spoke. "I think," he said, "I never in my life saw anybody more on the look-out. It's terrible, that prowling genius, always ready to spring."

"I know," she said, "he sees everything."

"No, Nina, he does n't. He's a man whose genius has made away with one half of his capacity for seeing. That's his

curse! If your eyes are incessantly looking out they lose the power of looking in."

"And yet, he's the only really great psychologist we've got. He and Jane Holland."

"Yes, as they go, your psychologists. Tanqueray sees so much inside other people that he can't see inside himself. What's worse, I should n't think he'd see far inside the people who really touch him. It comes of perpetually looking away."

"You don't know him. How can you tell?"

"Because I never look away."

"Can you see what's going on inside *me*?"

"Sometimes. I don't always look."

"Can you help looking?"

"Of course you can."

"You *may* look. I don't think I mind your looking. Why," she asked abruptly, "don't I mind?"

Her voice had an accent that betrayed her.

"Because there's nothing inside you that you're ashamed of."

She reddened with shame; shame of the fierce, base instinct that had made her keep him to herself. She knew that nothing escaped him. He had the keen, comprehending eyes of the physician who knows the sad secrets of the body; and he had other eyes that saw inward, that held and drew to confession the terrified, reluctant soul. She had an insane longing to throw herself at his feet in confession.

"Yes," she said, "but there are *things* — And yet —"

He stopped her. "Nothing, Nina, if you really knew yourself."

"Owen — it's not that. It's not because I don't know myself. It's because I know you. I know that, whatever there might be in me, whatever I did, however low I sank — if I could sink — your charity would be there to hold me up. And it would n't be your charity, either. I could n't stand your charity. It would n't even be understanding. You don't understand me. It would be some knowledge of me that I could n't have myself, that nobody but you could have. As if whatever you saw you'd say, 'That is n't really Nina.'"

"I should say, 'That's really Nina, so it's all right.'"

She paused, brooding on the possibilities he saw, that he was bound to see, if he saw anything. Did he, she wondered, really see what was in her, her hidden shames and insanities, the course of the wild blood that he knew must flow from all the Lempriers to her? She lived, to be sure, the life of an ascetic and took it out in dreams. Yet he must see how her savage, solitary passion clung to him, and would not let go. Did he see, and yet did he not condemn her?

"Owen," she said suddenly, "do you mind seeing?"

"Sometimes I hate it. These are n't the things, you know, I want to see."

She lowered her eyes. Her nervous hand moved slowly to and fro along the window-sill, measuring her next words.

"What — do you want — to see?"

He rose to his feet and looked at her. At her, not through her, and she wondered, had he seen enough? It was as if he withdrew himself before some thought that stirred in her, menacing to peace.

"I can't tell you," he said. "I can't talk about it."

Then she knew what he meant. He was thinking of his vision, his vision of God.

He could not speak of it to her. She had never known him. This soul, with which her own claimed kindred, was hidden from her by all the veils of heaven.

"I know," she said. "Only tell me one thing. Was that what you went out to India and Central Africa to see?"

That drew him.

"No. I went out not to see it. To get away from it. I meant to give things their chance. That's why I went in for medicine. I was n't going to shirk. I wanted to be a man. Not a long-haired, weedy thing in a soft hat."

"Was it any good?"

"Yes. I proved the unreality of things. I proved it up to the hilt. And I *did* n't shirk."

"But you wanted to escape, all the time?"

"I did n't escape. I could n't. I could n't catch cholera, or plague, *or* sleeping sickness. I could n't catch anything."

"You tried?"

"Oh, yes, I gave *myself* a chance. That was only fair. But it was no use. I could n't even get frightened."

"Owen — some people would say you were morbid."

"No, they would n't. They'd say I was mad. They *will* say it when I've published those poems."

"Did you mind my showing them to George Tanqueray?"

"No. But it's no use. Nobody knows my name."

"May I show them to Jane Holland?"

"Show them to any one you like. It'll be no use either."

"Owen — does it never occur to you that any human being can be of use?"

"No." He considered the point. "No, I can't say it ever does."

He stood before her, wrapped in his dream, removed from her, utterly forgetful.

She had her moment of pain in contemplating him. He saw it in her face, and as it were came back to her.

"Don't imagine," he said, "that I don't know what *you*'ve done. Now that I do know you."

She turned, almost in anger. "I've done nothing. You don't know me." She added, "I am going to write to Jane Holland."

When he had left her she sat a long while by the window, brooding on the thing that had happened to her a second time.

She had fallen in love; fallen with the fatality of the Lemprieres, and with the fine precipitate sweep of her own genius. And she had let herself go, with the recklessness of a woman unaware of her genius for loving, with the superb innocence, too, of all spontaneous forces. Owen's nature had disarmed her of all subterfuges, all ordinary defences of her sex. They were absurd in dealing with a creature so remote and disembodied.

She knew that in his way, his remote and disembodied way, he cared for her. She knew that in whatever place he held her

she was alone there. She was the only woman for whom as yet he had cared. His way was not Tanqueray's way. It was a way that kept her safe. She had sworn that there were to be no more George Tanquerays; and there were none. She had done with that.

Not but that she was afraid of Owen. She had taken possession of him in fear, a secret, unallowed possession, a holding with hands invisible, intangible. For she had wisdom, the sad wisdom of the frustrate; it, and the insight of her genius, told her that Owen would not endure a tie less spiritual than friendship. She knew George Tanqueray's opinion of her. He was justified.

But though she sacrificed so far to spirit, it was her flesh and blood that shrank from the possible communion of Owen Prothero and Jane Holland. For Jinny, as Tanqueray said, had a way with her; and she knew Jinny's way. Jinny would take Owen Prothero from her as she had taken George, not deliberately, not because she wanted to, but because she was Jinny and had a way. Besides, Jane could do for him what she with her bare genius could not do, and that thought was insupportable to Nina. Yesterday she had been everything to him. Tomorrow Jane would be as much, or more.

And there were other women. They would be as ready as she to take possession. They would claim his friendship, and more than she had claimed, as the reward of having recognized him. There was no reason why she should give Owen up, and hand him over to them. And this was what she would do if she wrote that letter to Jane Holland.

She rose, and went to her desk and wrote it.

XXII

JANE answered at once. If Nina would bring Prothero to Kensington on Friday at four o'clock he would meet Hugh Brodrick.

But Prothero refused to be taken anywhere. He would not go hanging about women's drawing-rooms. It was the sort of thing, he said, that did you harm. He wanted to hold on to what he'd got. It was tricky; it came and went; it was all he could do to hold on to it; and if he got mixed up with women he was done for. Of course he was profoundly grateful.

- Nina assured Jane that Mr. Prothero was profoundly grateful. But he was, she said, a youth of an untamable shyness. He was happy in an Indian jungle or an African swamp, but civilized interiors seemed to sadden him. She therefore proposed that Tanqueray, who had the manuscript, should read it to an audience, chosen with absolute discretion. Two or three people, not a horrid crowd. For the poems, she warned her fairly, were all about God; and nowadays people didn't care about God. Owen Prothero didn't seem to care much about anything else. It was bound, she said, to handicap him.

Jane consented. After all, the poems were the thing. For audience she proposed Hugh Brodrick, Caro Bickersteth, Laura, and Arnott Nicholson. Dear Nicky, who really was an angel, could appreciate people who were very far from appreciating him. He knew a multitude of little men on papers, men who write you up if they take a fancy to you and go about singing your praises everywhere. Nicky himself, if strongly moved to it, might sing. Nicky was a good idea, and there was Laura who also wrote for the papers.

The reading was fixed for Friday at four o'clock. Tanqueray, who detested readings, had overcome his repugnance for Prothero's sake. His letter to Jane was one fiery eulogy of the

poet. Brodrick and the others had accepted the unique invitation, Laura Gunning provisionally. She would come like a shot, if she could get off, she said, but things were going badly at the moment.

Laura, however, was the first to arrive.

"Who is this man of Nina's?" said she.

"I don't know, my dear. I never heard of him till the other day."

She showed her Nina's letter.

Laura's face was sullen. It indicated that things were going very badly indeed; that Laura was at the end of her tether.

"But why God?" was her profane comment.

"Because, I imagine, he believes in him."

Laura declared that it was more than she did. She preferred not to believe in him, after the things that had been done to Papa. Her arraignment of the cosmic order was cut short by the arrival of George Tanqueray.

Nina appeared next. She was followed by Hugh Brodrick and by Caro Bickersteth. Nicky came last of all.

He greeted Jane a little mournfully. It was impossible for Nicky to banish altogether from his manner the delicate reproach he felt, impossible not to be alive to the atrocious irony that brought him here to be, as Jane said, an angel, to sit and listen to this fellow Prothero. He understood that they were all there to do something for Prothero. Brodrick had been brought solely for that purpose. Tanqueray, too, and Miss Bickersteth and Miss Gunning, and he. Jane Holland was always asking him to do things, and she had never done anything for him. There was Brodrick's magazine that he had never got into. Jane Holland had only got to speak to Brodrick, only got to say to him that Arnott Nicholson was a rather fine poet and the thing was done. It was a small thing and an easy thing for her to do.

It was not so much that he wanted her to do things. He even now shrank, in his delicacy, from the bare idea of her doing them. For all his little palpitating ambition, Nicky shrank. What hurt him was the unavoidable inference he drew. When

a woman cares for a man she does not doom him to obscurity by her silence, and Jane least of all women. He knew her. He knew what she had done for Tanqueray because she cared.

And now she was going to do things for Owen Prothero. Nicky sat dejected in the sorrow of this thought.

Brodrick also was oppressed. He was thinking of his magazine. It had been saved by Jane Holland, but he was aware that at this rate it could also be ruined by her. He knew what he was there for. He could see, with the terrible foreknowledge of the editor, that Prothero was to be pressed on him. He was to take him up as he had taken up Tanqueray. And from all that he had heard of Prothero he very much doubted whether he could afford to take him up. It was becoming a serious problem what he could afford. Levine was worrying him. Levine was insisting on concessions to the public, on popular articles, on politics. He had threatened, if his views were disregarded, to withdraw his financial co-operation, and Brodrick realized that he could not as yet afford to do without Levine. He might have to refuse to take Prothero up, and he hated to refuse Jane Holland anything.

As for Laura, she continued in her sullenness, anticipating with resentment the assault about to be made upon her soul.

And Jane, who knew what passed in Brodrick's mind, was downcast in her turn. She did not want Brodrick to think that she was making use of him, that she was always trying to get at him.

Tanqueray, a transformed, oblivious Tanqueray, had unrolled the manuscript. They grouped themselves for the reading, Nina on a corner of the sofa; Jane lying back in the other corner; Laura looking at Tanqueray over Nina's shoulder, with her chair drawn close beside her; Nicholson and Brodrick on other chairs, opposite the sofa, where they could look at Jane.

It was to this audience that Tanqueray first read young Prothero's poems of the Vision of God; to Laura, who did n't believe in God; to Jane, absorbed in her embarrassments; to Nina, tortured by many passions; to Hugh Brodrick, bearing

visibly the financial burden of his magazine; to Caro Bickersteth, dubious and critical; to Nicky, struggling with the mean hope that Prothero might not prove so very good.

They heard of the haunting of the divine Lover; of the soul's mortal terror; of the divine pursuit, of the flight and the hiding of the soul, of its crying out in its terror; of its finding; of the divine consummation; of its eternal vision and possession of God.

Nicky's admirable judgment told him that as a competitive poet he was dished by Prothero. He maintained his attitude of extreme depression. His eyes, fixed on Jane, were now startled out of their agony into a sudden wonder at Prothero, now clouded again as Nicky manifestly said to himself, "Dished, dished, dished." He was dished by Prothero, dished by Tanqueray, reduced to sitting there, like an angel, conquering his desire, sublimely renouncing.

Brodrick's head was bowed forward on his chest. His eyes, under his lowering brows, looked up at Jane's, gathering from them her judgment of Owen Prothero. Prothero's case defied all rule and precedent, and Brodrick was not prepared with a judgment of his own. Now and then a gleam of comprehension, caught from Jane, illuminated his face and troubled it. He showed, not as a happy creature of the flesh, but as a creature of the flesh made discontent, divinely pierced by the sharp flame of the spirit.

It was so that Jane saw him, once, when his persistent gaze drew hers for an inconsiderable moment. Now and then, at a pause in the reader's voice, Brodrick sighed heavily and shifted his position.

Nina leaned back as she listened, propping her exhausted body, her soul surrendered as ever to the violent rapture; caught now and carried away into a place beyond pain, beyond dreams, beyond desire.

And Laura, who did not believe in God, Laura sat motionless, her small insurgent being stilled to the imperceptible rhythm of her breath. Over her face there passed strange lights, strange tremors, a strange softening of the small indomitable mouth. It was more than ever the face of a child, of a flower,

of all things innocent and open. But her eyes were the eyes of a soul whom vision makes suddenly mature. They stared at Tanqueray without seeing him, held by the divine thing they saw.

She still sat so, while Brodrick and Nicholson, like men released, came forward and congratulated the novelist as on some achievement of his own. They did it briefly, restrained by the silence that his voice had sunk into. Everybody's nerves were tense, troubled by the vibrating passage of the supersensual. The discussion that followed was spasmodic and curt.

Nicky charged into the silence with a voice of violent affirmation. "He is great," said poor Nicky.

"Too great," said Brodrick, "for the twentieth century."

Nina reminded him that the twentieth century had only just begun, and Jane remarked that it had n't done badly since it had begun with him.

Laura said nothing; but, as they parted outside in the square, she turned eastwards with Nina.

"Does he really mind seeing people?" she said.

"It depends," said Nina. "He's seen George."

"Would he mind your bringing him to see me some day? I want to know him."

Nina's face drew back as if Laura had struck her. Its haggard, smitten look spoke as if Nina had spoken. "What do you want to know him for?" it said.

"He has n't got to be seen," said Nina herself savagely. She was overwrought. "He's got to be heard. You've heard him."

"It's because I've heard him that I want to see him."

Nina paused in her ferocious stride and glanced at the little thing. The small face of her friend had sunk from its ecstasy to its sullen suffering, its despondency, its doubt.

Nina was stung by compassion.

"Do you want to see him very much?" she said.

"I would n't ask you if I did n't."

"All right. You shall. I'll make him come."

XXIII

WITHIN a fortnight of that reading Prothero received a letter from George Tanqueray. It briefly told him that the lady whom he had refused to meet had prevailed upon her publishers to bring out his poems in the autumn, at their own and not Prothero's expense.

How the miracle had been worked he could n't conceive, and Tanqueray was careful to leave him unenlightened. It had been simply a stock instance of Jinny's way. Jinny, whose affairs were in Tanqueray's hands, had been meditating an infidelity to Messrs. Molyneux, by whom Tanqueray vehemently assured her she had been, and always would be, "had." They had "had" her this time by the sacrificial ardour with which they soared to her suggestion that Mr. Prothero should be published. Miss Holland must, they urged, be aware that Mr. Prothero had been rejected by every other firm in London. They were sure that she realized the high danger of their enterprise and that she appreciated the purity of their enthusiasm. The poems were, as she knew, so extraordinary that Mr. Prothero had not one chance in a thousand even with the small public that read poetry. Still, they were giving Mr. Prothero his fractional opportunity, because of their enthusiasm and their desire to serve Miss Holland. They understood that Miss Holland was thinking of leaving them. They would not urge her to remain, but they hoped that, for her own sake, she would reconsider it.

Jane had reconsidered it and had remained.

"You understand clearly, Jinny," Tanqueray had said, "that you're paying for Prothero's poems?"

To that Jinny had replied, "It's what I wanted to do, and there was n't any other way."

Owen Prothero could no longer say that nobody knew his

name. His innocence was unaware of the secret processes by which names are made and unmade; but he had gathered from Nina that her friends had created for him a rumour and reputation which he persistently refused to incarnate by his presence among them. He said he wanted to preserve his innocence. Tanqueray's retirement was not more superb or more indignant; Tanqueray had been fortuitously and infrequently "met"; but nobody met Prothero anywhere. Even Jane Holland, the authentic fount of rumour, had not met him.

It was hard on Jane that she who was, as she piteously pleaded, the prey of all the destroyers, should not be allowed a sight of this incomparable creator. But she respected the divine terror that kept Nina's unlicked Celt outside women's drawing-rooms.

She understood, however, that he was to be seen and seen more often than not, at Tanqueray's rooms in Torrington Square. Tanqueray's wife did not count. She was not the sort of woman Prothero could be afraid of, and she was guiltless of having any drawing-room. Jane remembered that it was a long time since she had seen Tanqueray's wife.

One afternoon, about five o'clock, she called in Torrington Square. She approached the house in some anxiety, afraid of seeing the unhappy little face of Tanqueray's wife looking out of the ground-floor window.

But Rose was not at the window. The curtains were drawn across, obviously for the purpose of concealing Rose. A brougham waited before the door.

Jane, as she entered, had a sense of secrecy and disturbance in the house. There was secrecy and disturbance, too, in the manner of the little shabby maid who told her that the doctor was in there with Mrs. Tanqueray.

She was going away when Tanqueray came out of the sitting-room where the doctor was.

"Don't go, Jinny," he said.

She searched his face.

"Oh, George, is anything the matter?"

He raised his eyebrows. His moustache tilted with them,

upwards. She recognized the gesture with which he put disagreeable things away from him.

"Oh, dear me, no," he said.

"May I see her — afterwards?"

"Of course you may see her. But" — he smiled — "if you'll come upstairs you'll see Prothero."

She followed him to the room on the top floor, his refuge, pitched high above Rose and her movements and her troubles.

He paused at the door.

"He may thank his stars, Jinny, that he came across Nina instead of you."

"You think I'd better keep clear of him?"

"No. I think he'd better keep clear of you."

"George, is he really there?"

"Yes, he's there all right. He's caught. He's trapped. He can't get away from you."

"I won't," she said. "It's dishonourable."

He laughed and they went in.

The poet was sitting in Tanqueray's low chair, facing them. He rose at some length as they entered, and she discerned in his eyes the instinct of savage flight. She herself would have turned and fled, but for the singularity of such precipitance. She was afraid before this shyness of the unlicked Celt, of the wild creature trapped and caught unaware, by the guile she judged dishonourable.

Tanqueray had hardly introduced them before he was called off to the doctor. He must leave them, he said, to each other.

They did not talk. They sat in an odd, intuitive silence, a silence that had no awkwardness and no embarrassment. It was intimate, rather, and vividly revealing. You would have said, coming upon them there, that they had agreed upon this form of communion and enjoyed it.

It gave her leisure in which to take him more securely in. Her gaze was obliquely attentive to his face, rugged and battered by travel, sallow now, where it had once been bronze. She saw that his soul had passed through strange climates.

It was borne in on her, as they continued in their silence, that she knew something about him, something certain and terrible, something that must, ultimately and inevitably, happen to him.

She caught herself secretly defining it. Tuberculosis — that was it; that was the certain and inevitable thing. Of course; anybody would have seen it. That she had not seen it at the first glance she attributed to the enchantment of his personality that held her from any immediate consideration of his singular physique. If it were not, indeed, his own magnificent oblivion. When she looked, she could see how lean he was, how insufficiently nourished. His clothes hung on him in folds; they were worn to an incredible shabbiness. Yet he carried them with an indomitable distinction. He had the grace, in flank and limb. of the wild thing made swift by hunger.

Her seeing all this now made their silence unendurable. It also suggested the thing she at last said.

"I'm distressed about Mrs. Tanqueray. I hope it's nothing serious."

Prothero's face was serious; more serious by far than Tanqueray's had been.

"Too much contemplation," he said, "is bad for her. She is n't cut out for a contemplative, though she's in a fair way of becoming a saint and ——"

She filled his blank, "And a martyr?"

"What can you expect when a man mates like that?"

"It's natural," she pleaded.

"Natural? It's one of the most unnatural marriages I've ever come across. It's a crime against nature for a man like Tanqueray to have taken that poor little woman — who is nature pure and simple — and condemn her to ——"

She drew back visibly. "I know. He does n't see it," she said.

"He does n't see anything. He does n't even know she's there. How can he? His genius runs to flesh and blood, and he has n't room for any more of it outside his own imagination. That's where you are with your great realists."

She gazed at him, astonished, admiring. This visionary, this poet so estranged from flesh and blood, had put his finger on the fact.

"You mean," she said, "a visionary would see more?"

He shrugged his shoulders at her reference.

"He would have more room," he said, "that would be all. He could at any rate afford to take more risks."

They were silent again.

"I believe," he said presently, "somebody's coming. I shall have to go."

Jane turned her head. The sounds he heard so distinctly were inaudible to her.

They proved to be footsteps on the staircase, footsteps that could never have been Rose's nor yet Tanqueray's. They paused heavily at the door. Some one was standing there, breathing.

A large woman entered very slowly, and Jane arrived, also slowly, at the conclusion that it must be Mrs. Eldred, George's wife's aunt.

Mrs. Eldred acknowledged her presence and Prothero's by a vague movement of respect. It was not till Prothero had gone that she admitted that she would be glad to take a chair. She explained that she was Rose's aunt, and that she had never been up them stairs before and found them tryin'.

Jane expressed sorrow for that fact and for Rose's illness.

Mrs. Eldred sighed an expository sigh.

"She's frettin' an' she's worritin'. She's worritin' about 'Im. It is n't natch'ral, that life 'E leads, and it's tellin' on 'er."

"Something's telling on her."

Mrs. Eldred leaned forward and lowered her voice. "It's this way, miss. 'E is n't properly a 'usban' to 'er."

"You should n't say that, Mrs. Eldred. He's very fond of her."

"Fond of 'er I dare say 'E may be. But 'E neglec's 'er."

"You should n't say that, either."

"Well, miss, I can't 'elp sayin' it. Wot else is it, when 'E

shuts 'imself up with 'is writin' all day long and 'alf the night, and she a-settin' and a-frettin'?"

She looked round the room, apparently recognizing with resentment the scene of Tanqueray's perpetual infidelity.

"But," said Jane, "he'd be away as much if he was in business."

"'Ef 'E was in business there'd be the evenin's to look forward to. And there'd be 'is Saturdays and Sundays. As it is, wot is there for her to look forward to?"

"At any rate she knows he's there."

"It's knowin' that 'E's there wot does it. It's not as if she 'ad a 'ouse to look after, or a little baby to take 'er mind orf of 'im."

"No, it is n't."

A sound of yapping came faintly up from the ground-floor.

"That's Joey," said Mrs. Eldred tearfully, "'er Pom as she was so fond of. I've brought 'im. And I've brought Minny too."

"Minny?" Jane had not heard of Minny.

"The cat, miss. They'll keep 'er company. It's but right as she should 'ave them."

Jane assented warmly that it was but right.

"It's not," Mrs. Eldred continued, "as if she came reg'lar, say once in a week, to see 'er uncle and me. She'll go to Camden Town and set with that poor old Mr. Gunning. Give Rose any one that's ill. But wot is that *but* settin'? And now, you see, with settin' she's ill. It's all very well when you're brought up to it, but she is n't. Rose'd be well if she 'ad a 'ouse and did the work in it. And 'E won't let 'er 'ave it. 'E won't 'ear of 'er workin', 'E says."

"Well, naturally, he would n't like to see his wife working."

"Then, miss, 'E should 'ave married a lady 'as would n't want to work. That's wot 'E should have done. We were always against it from the first, 'er uncle and me was. But they was set, bein' young-like."

Mrs. Eldred's voice ceased suddenly as Tanqueray entered.

Jane abstained from all observation of their greeting. She was aware of an unnatural suavity in Tanqueray's manner. He carried it so far as to escort Mrs. Eldred all the way down to the ground-floor sitting-room where Rose was.

He returned with considerable impetus to Jane.

"Well, Jinny, so you've seen my aunt-in-law?"

"I have," said Jinny contumaciously, "and I like her."

"What do you think? She's brought a dog on a chain and a beast of a cat in a basket."

Jinny abstained from sympathy, and Tanqueray grew grave.

"I wish I knew what was the matter with Rose," he said. "She does n't seem to get much better. The doctor swears it's only liver; but he's a silly ass."

"Tanks, there's nothing the matter really, except — the poor little bird wants to build its nest. It wants sticks and straws and feathers and things ——"

"Do you mean I've got to go and find a beastly house?"

"Let her go and find it."

"I would in a minute — only I'm so hard up."

"Of course you'll be hard up if you go on living in rooms like this."

"That's what she says. But when she talks about a house she means that she'll do all the work in it."

"Why not?" said Jane.

"Why not? I married her because I was n't going to have her worked to death in that damned lodging-house of her uncle's."

"You married her because you loved her," said Jane quietly.

"Well — of course. And I'm not going to let my wife cook my dinner and make my bed and empty my slops. How can I?"

"She'll die if you don't, George."

"Die?"

"She'll get horribly ill. She's ill now because she can't run about and sweep and dust and cook dinners. She's dying for love of all the beautiful things you won't let her have —

pots and pans and carpet-sweepers and besoms. You don't want her to die of an unhappy passion for a besom?"

"I don't want to see her with a besom."

Jane pleaded. "She'd look so pretty with it, George. Just think how pretty she'd look in a little house, playing with a carpet-sweeper."

"On her knees, scrubbing the kitchen floor ——"

"You'd have a woman in to scrub."

"Carrying the coals?"

"*You'd* carry the coals, George."

"By Jove, I never thought of that. I suppose I could." He pondered.

"You see," he said, "she wants to live at Hampstead."

"You can't cut her off from her own people."

"I'm not cutting her off. She goes to see them."

"She'll go to see them if you live at Hampstead. If you live here they'll come and see you. For she'll be ill and they'll have to."

Tanqueray looked at her, not without admiration.

"Jinny, you're ten times cleverer than I."

"In some things, Tanks, I am. And so is that wife of yours."

"She's — very sensible. I suppose it's sensible to be in love with a carpet-sweeper."

She shook her head at him.

"Much more sensible than being in love with *you*."

His eyes evaded her. She rose.

"Oh, Tanks, you goose. Can't you see that it's you she's in love with — and that's why she *must* have a carpet-sweeper?"

With that she left him.

He followed her to the doorstep where he turned abruptly from her departure.

Rose in the sitting-room was kneeling by the hearth where she had just set a saucer of milk. With one hand she was loosening very gently from her shoulder the claws of Minny, the cat, who clung to her breast, scrambling, with the passion

and desperation of his kind. Her other hand restrained with a soft caressing movement Joey's approaches to the saucer. Joey, though trembling with excitement, sat fascinated, obedient to her gesture. Joey was puny and hairless as ever, but in Rose's face as she looked at him there was a flush of maternal tenderness and gravity. A slightly sallow tinge under its sudden bloom told how Rose had suffered from the sedentary life.

All this Tanqueray saw as he entered. It held him on the threshold, unmoved by the rushing assault and lacerating bark of the little dog, who resented his intrusion.

Rose got up and came to him, lifting a frightened, pleading face.

"Oh, George," she said, "don't make me send them away. Let me keep them."

"I suppose you must keep them if you want them."

"I never said I wanted them. Aunt *would* bring them. She thought they'd be something to occupy my mind, like."

Tanqueray smiled, in spite of his gentleness, at the absurd idea of Rose having a mind.

Rose made a little sound in her throat like a laugh. She had not laughed, she had hardly smiled, for many months now.

"The doctor — 'e's fair pleased. 'E says I'll 'ave to go out walkin' now, for Joey's sake."

"Poor Joey."

He stooped and stroked the little animal, who stood on ridiculous hind-legs, straining to lick his hand.

"His hair does n't come on, Rose ——"

"It has n't been brushed proper. You should brush a Pom's 'air backwards ——"

"Of course, and it has n't been brushed backwards. He can bark all right, anyhow. There's nothing wrong with his lungs."

"He won't bark at you no more, now he knows you."

She leaned her face to the furry head on her shoulder, and he recognized Minny by the strange pattern of his back and tail. Minny was not beautiful.

"It's Minny," she said. "You used to like Minny."

It struck him with something like a pang that she held him like a child at her breast. She saw his look and smiled up at him.

"I may keep him, too?"

At that he kissed her.

By the end of that evening Tanqueray had not written a word. He could only turn over the pages of his manuscript, in wonder at the mechanical industry that had covered so much paper with such awful quantities of ink. Here and there he recognized a phrase, and then he was aware, very miserably aware, that the thing was his masterpiece. He wondered, and with agony, how on earth he was going to finish it if they came about him like this and destroyed his peace.

It was n't the idea of the house. The house was bad enough; the house indeed was abominable. It was Rose. It was more than Rose; it was everything; it was the touch, the intimate, unendurable strain and pressure of life.

It was all very well for Prothero to talk. His genius was safe, it was indestructible. It had the immunity of the transcendent. It worked, not in flesh and blood, but in a divine material. Whatever Prothero did it remained unmoved, untroubled by the impact of mortality. Prothero could afford his descents, his immersions in the stuff of life. He, Tanqueray, could not, for life was the stuff he worked in. To immerse himself was suicidal; it was the dyer plunging into his own vat.

Because his genius was a thing of flesh and blood, flesh and blood was the danger always at its threshold, the enemy in its house. For the same reason it was sufficient to itself. It fulfilled the functions, it enjoyed the excitements and the satisfactions of sense. It reproduced reality so infallibly, so solidly, so completely, that it took reality's place; it made him unconscious of his wife's existence and of the things that went on beneath him in the ground-floor sitting-room.

Yet he was not and had never been indifferent to life itself. He approached it, not with precaution or prejudice or any cold discretion, but with the supreme restraint of passion on guard against its own violence. If he had given himself to it, what

a grip it would have had on him, what a terrible, destructive grip; if, say, he had found his mate; if he had married a woman, who, exulting in life, would have drawn him into it.

Rose had not drawn him in. She had done nothing assailing and destructive. She was, in some respects, the most admirable wife a man bent on solitude could have selected. The little thing had never got in his way. She was no longer disturbing to the intellect, nor agitating to the heart; and she satisfied, sufficiently, the infrequent craving of his senses. Up till now he would hardly have known that he was married; it had been so easy to ignore her.

But to-day she had been forced on his attention. The truth about Rose had been presented to him very plainly and boldly by Prothero, by the doctor, by Mrs. Eldred and by Jane. It was the same naked truth that in his novels he himself presented with the utmost plainness and boldness to the British public. His genius knew no other law but truth to Nature, trust in Nature, unbroken fidelity to Nature. And now it was Nature that arraigned his genius for its frustration of her purposes in Rose. His genius had made Rose the victim of its own incessant, inextinguishable lust and impulse to create.

Eleven o'clock struck and he had not written a line. Through his window he heard the front door open and Rose's little feet on the pavement, and Rose's voice calling into the darkness her old call, "Puss — Puss — Puss. Minny — Min — Min — Minny. Puss — Puss — Puss."

He sighed. He had realized for the first time that he was married.

XXIV

NINA kept her promise, although Prothero protested that he saw no reason why he should be taken to see Laura Gunning. He was told that he need not be afraid of Laura. She was too small, Nina said, to do him any harm. Refusing to go and see Laura was like refusing to go and see a sick child. Ultimately, with extreme unwillingness, he consented.

Laura was the poorest of them all, and she lived on a top-floor in Albert Street, Camden Town, under desperate restrictions of time and space. For she had a family, and the peculiarity and the awkwardness of Laura's family was that it was always there. She spoke of it briefly as Papa.

It was four years now since Mr. Gunning's sunstroke and his bankruptcy; for four years his mind had been giving way, very slowly and softly, and now he was living, without knowing it, on what Laura wrote. Nobody but Laura knew what heavy odds she fought against, struggling to bring her diminutive talent to perfection. Poverty was always putting temptation in her way. She knew that she had chosen the most expensive and the least remunerative form of her delightful art. She knew that there were things she could do, concessions she could make, sacrifices, a thousand facile extensions of the limit, a thousand imponderable infidelities to the perfection she adored. But they were sins, and though poverty pinched her for it, she had never committed one of them.

And yet Laura was cruel to her small genius. It was delicate, and she drove it with all the strength of her hard, indomitable will. She would turn it on to any rough journalistic work that came to her hand. It had not yet lost its beauty and its freshness. But it was threatened. They were beginning, Nina said, to wonder how long Laura would hold out.

It was not Poverty that had wrecked her. She could bear

that. Poverty had been good to her; it had put her woman's talent to the test, justifying its existence, proving it a marketable thing. She rejoiced in her benign adversity, and woman-like, she hated herself for rejoicing. For there was always the thought that if she had not been cursed, as to her talent, with this perverse instinct for perfection, Papa would not have had to live, as he did live, miserably, on a top-floor in Camden Town.

It was May and the keen light raked her room, laying its bareness still more bare. It was furnished, Laura's room, with an extreme austerity. There was a little square of blue drugget under the deal table that stood against the wall, and one green serge curtain at each window. There was a cupboard and an easy-chair for Mr. Gunning on one side of the fireplace next the window. On the other, the dark side, was Laura's writing-table, with a book-shelf above it. Another book-shelf faced the fireplace. That was all.

Here, for three years, Laura had worked, hardly ever alone, and hardly ever in silence, except when the old man dozed in the easy-chair.

Some rooms, however disguised by their furniture, have a haunted air, an atmosphere of spiritual joy or tragedy, nobility or holiness, or spiritual squalor. Ghostly fragments, torn portions of the manifold self, are lodged there; they drift for ever and ever between the four walls of the room and penetrate and torment you with its secret. Prothero, coming into Laura's room, was smitten and pierced with a sense of mortal pathos, a small and lonely pathos, holding itself aloof, drifting about him, a poor broken ghost, too proud to approach him or to cling.

Laura was at home. She was writing, snatching at the few golden moments of her day, while apart from and unaware of her, sunken in his seat, the old man dozed by the fireside. From time to time she glanced at him, and then her face set under its tenderness, as if it fronted, unflinching, an immovable, perpetual fear.

Prothero, as he crossed her threshold, had taken in the unhappy, childlike figure, and that other figure, sunken in its seat,

slumbering, inert, the image of decay. He stood still for a moment before Laura, as a man stands when he is struck with wonder.

He took without speaking the hand, the ridiculously small, thin hand she gave him, touching it as if he were afraid lest he might hurt the fragile thing.

He knew what Nina had meant when she said that he need not be afraid of her, that she could n't do him any harm.

He saw a mere slender slip of a body, a virginal body, straight-clad; the body and the face of a white child. Her almost rudimentary features cast no shade; her lips had kept the soft, low curve of their childhood, their colourless curl flattened against her still, white face. He saw all that, and he saw the sleeping tenderness in her eyes; deep-down it slept, under dark blue veils. Her eyes made him forgive her forehead, the only thing about her which was not absurdly small.

And of all this he was afraid, afraid for the wonder and mystery it evoked in him. He saw that Nina watched him and that she was aware of his fear.

She was dangerously, uncontrollably aware of it, and aware of her own folly in bringing him to Laura against his judgment and his will. She might have known that for him there would be a charm, a perfection in her very immaturity, that she would have for him all the appealing, pathetic beauty of her type. For him, Nina, watching with a fierce concentration, saw that she was virginity reduced to its last and most exquisite simplicity.

They had said nothing to each other. Laura, in the wonderful hour of his coming, could find nothing to say to him. He noticed that she and Nina talked in low, rapid voices, as if they feared that at any moment the old man might awake.

Then Laura arose and began to get tea ready, moving very softly in her fear.

"You'd better let me cut the bread and butter," said Prothero.

Laura let him.

Nina heard them talking over the bread and butter while Laura made the tea. She saw that his eyes did not follow her

about the room, but that they rested on her when she was not looking.

"You were hard at work when we came," he was saying.

Laura denied it.

"If I may say so, you look as if you'd been at it far too long."

"No. I'm never at it long enough. The bother is getting back to where you were half-an-hour ago. It seems to take up most of the time."

"Then I ought n't — ought I — to take up any of it?"

"Oh, please," said Laura, "take it. I can't do anything with it."

She had the air of offering it to him like bread and butter on a plate.

"Time," she said, "is about all we've got here. At any rate there will be time for tea." She examined the cupboard. "It looks as if time were about all we were going to have for tea." She explored the ultimate depth of the cupboard. "I wonder if I could find some jam. Do you like jam?"

"I adore it."

That was all they said.

"Need you," said Nina to Prothero, "spread the butter quite so thick?" Even in her agony she wondered how much, at the rate he was spreading it, would be left for the Kiddy's supper.

"He shall spread it," said the Kiddy superbly, "as thick as ever he likes."

They called Nina to the table. She ate and drank; but Laura's tea scalded her; Laura's bread and butter choked her; she sickened at it; and when she tried to talk her voice went dry in her throat.

And in his chair by the fireside, the old man dropped from torpor to torpor, apart and unaware of them. When he waked they would have to go.

"Do you think," said Laura, "I'd better wake Papa?"

That was a question which this decided little person had never been able to decide for herself. It was too momentous.

"No," said Nina, "I think you'd better not."

It was then that Mr. Gunning waked himself, violently; starting and staring, his pale eyes round with terror; for his sunstroke had made him dream dreams.

Laura gave an inarticulate murmur of compassion. She knelt by him, and held his hands in hers and stroked them.

"What is it, Papa dear, have you had a little dream? Poor darling," she said, "he has such horrid ones."

Mr. Gunning looked about him, still alarmed, still surrounded as in his dream, by appalling presences. He was a little man, with a weak, handsome face, worn and dragged by emotion.

"What's all this? What's all this?" he reiterated, until out of the throng of presences he distinguished dimly a woman's form. He smiled at it. He was almost wide awake now.

"Is it Rose?" he said.

"No, Papa. It's Nina."

Mr. Gunning became dejected. If it had been Rose she would have sat beside him and talked to him a little while.

He was perfectly wide awake now; he had seen Prothero; and the sight of Prothero revived in him his one idea. His idea was that every man who saw Laura would want to pick the little thing up and carry her away from him. He was haunted by the fear of losing Laura. He had lost everything he had and had forgotten it; but a faint memory of disaster persisted in his idea.

"What are you going to do with my little girl?" he said. "You're not going to take her away? I won't have that. I won't have that."

"Is n't he funny?" said Laura, unabashed. And from where she knelt, there on the verge of her terror, she looked up at the young man and laughed. She laughed lest Prothero should feel uncomfortable.

Nina had risen for departure, and with a slow, reluctant movement of his long body, Prothero rose too. Nina could have sworn that almost he bowed his head over Laura's hand.

"May I come and see you again some day?" he said. And she said she would be very glad.

That was all.

Outside in the little dull street he turned to Nina.

"It was n't fair, Nina; you didn't tell me I was going to have my heart wrung."

"How could I know," she said fiercely, "what would wring your heart?"

He looked away lest he should seem to see what was in her. But she knew he saw.

THREE weeks passed. Prothero had been four times to see Miss Gunning. He had been once because she said he might come again; once because of a book he had promised to lend her; once because he happened to be passing; and once for no reason whatsoever. It was then borne in on him that what he required was a pretext. Calling late one evening he caught Miss Gunning in the incredible double act of flinging off a paragraph for the papers while she talked to Mr. Gunning.

His pretext, heaven-sent, unmistakable, stared him in the face. He could not write paragraphs for the papers (they would n't take his paragraphs), but he could talk to Mr. Gunning. It was not so difficult as he would have at first supposed. He had already learnt the trick of it. You took a chair. You made a statement. Any statement would do. You had only to say to Mr. Gunning, "Is n't that so?" and he would bow and assure you, with a solemn courtesy, that it was, and sit up waiting patiently for you to do it again; and you went on talking to Miss Gunning until he showed signs of restlessness. When you had done this several times running he would sink back in his chair appeased. But Prothero had discovered that if you concentrated your attention on Mr. Gunning, if you exposed him to a steady stream of statements, he invariably went to sleep; and while he slept Laura wrote.

And while Laura wrote, Owen could keep on looking at her as much as he liked.

From where he sat his half-closed eyes could take in rather more than a side view of Laura. He could see her head as it bent and turned over her work, showing, now the two low waves of its dark hair, now the flat coils at the back that took the beautiful curve of Laura's head. From time to time she would

look up at him and smile, and he would smile back again under his eyelids with a faint quiver of his moustache.

And Laura said to herself, "He is rather ugly, but I like him."

It was not odd that she should like him; but what struck her as amazing was the peace that in his presence settled on Papa. Once he had got over the first shock of his appearance, it soothed Mr. Gunning to see Prothero sitting there, smoking, his long legs stretched out, his head thrown back, his eyes half closed. It established him in the illusion of continued opulence, for Mr. Gunning was not aware of the things that had happened to him four years ago. But there had been lapses and vanishings, unaccountable disturbances of the illusion. In the days of opulence people had come to see him; now they only came to see Laura. They were always the same people, Miss Holland and Miss Lempriere and Mr. Tanqueray. They did no positive violence to the illusion; in their way they ministered to it. They took their place among the company of brilliant and indifferent strangers whom he had once entertained with cold ceremony and a high and distant courtesy. They stayed for a short time by his chair, they drifted from it into remote corners of the room, they existed only for each other and for Laura. Thus one half of his dream remained incomprehensible to Mr. Gunning. He did not really know these people.

But he knew Mr. Prothero, who took a chair beside him and stayed an hour and smoked a pipe with him. He had known him intimately and for a long time. His figure filled the dark and empty places in the illusion, and made it warm, tangible and complete. And because the vanished smokers, the comrades of the days of opulence, had paid hardly any attention to Laura, therefore Mr. Gunning's mind ceased to connect Prothero with his formidable idea.

Laura, who had once laughed at it, was growing curiously sensitive to the idea. She waited for it in dreadful pauses of the conversation; she sat shivering with the expectation of its coming. Sooner or later it would come, and when it did come

Papa would ask Mr. Prothero his intentions, and Mr. Prothero, having of course no intentions, would go away and never have anything to do with them again.

Prothero had not yet asked himself his intentions or even wondered what he was there for, since, as it seemed, it was not to talk to Laura. There had been opportunities, moments, pauses in the endless procession of paragraphs, when he had tried to draw Laura out; but Laura was not to be drawn. She had a perfect genius for retreating, vanishing from him backwards, keeping her innocent face towards him at the time, but backing, backing into her beloved obscurity. He felt that there were things behind her that forbade him to pursue.

Of the enchantment that had drawn her in the beginning, she had not said a word. When it came to that they were both silent, as by a secret understanding and consent. They were both aware of his genius as a thing that was and was not his, a thing perpetually present with them but incommunicable, the very heart of their silence.

One evening, calling about nine o'clock, he found her alone. She told him that Papa was very tired and had gone to bed. "It is very good of you," she said, "to come and sit with him."

Prothero smiled quietly. "May I sit with *you* now?"

"Please do."

They sat by the fireside, for even in mid-June the night was chilly. A few scattered ashes showed at the lowest bar of the grate. Laura had raked out the fire that had been lit to warm her father.

Papa, she explained, was not always as Mr. Prothero saw him now. His illness came from a sunstroke.

He said, yes; he had seen cases like that in India.

"Then, do you think ——"

She paused, lest she should seem to be asking for a professional opinion.

"Do I think? What do I think?"

"That he'll get better?"

He was silent a long time.

"No," he said. "But he need never be any worse. You must n't be afraid."

"I *am* afraid. I'm afraid all the time."

"What of?"

"Of some awful thing happening and of my not having the nerve to face it."

"You've nerve enough for anything."

"You don't know me. I'm an utter coward. I can't face things. Especially the thing I'm afraid of."

"What is it? Tell me." He leaned nearer to her, and she almost whispered.

"I'm afraid of his having a fit — epilepsy. He *might* have it."

"He might. But he won't. You must n't think of it."

"I'm always thinking of it. And the most — the most awful thing is that — I'm afraid of *seeing* it."

She bowed her head and looked away from him as if she had confessed to an unpardonable shame.

"Poor child. Of course you are," said Prothero. "We're all afraid of something. I'm afraid, if you'll believe it, of the sight of blood."

"You?"

"I."

"Oh — but you would n't lose your head and run away from it."

"Would n't I?"

"No. Or you could n't go and be a doctor. Why," she asked suddenly, "did you?"

"*Because* I was afraid of the sight of blood. You see, it was this way. My father was a country doctor — a surgeon. One day he sent me into his surgery. The butcher had been thrown out of his cart and had his cheek cut open. My father was sewing it up, and he wanted me — I was a boy about fifteen at the time — to stand by with lumps of cotton-wool and mop the butcher while he sewed him up. What do you suppose I did?"

"You fainted? — You were ill on the spot?"

"No. I was n't on the spot at all. I ran away."

A slight tremor passed over the whiteness of her face; he took it for the vibration of some spiritual recoil.

"What do you say to that?"

"I don't say anything."

"My father said I was a damned coward, and my mother said I was a hypocrite. I'd been reading the Book of Job, you see, when it happened."

"They might have known," she said.

"They might have known what?"

"That you were different."

"They did know it. After that, they never let it alone. They kept rubbing it into me all the time that I was different. As my father put it, I wore my cerebro-spinal system on the outside, and I had to grow a skin or two if I wanted to be a man and not an anatomical diagram. I'd got to prove that I *was* a man — that I was n't different after all."

"Well — you proved it."

"If I did my father never knew it."

"And your mother?" she said softly.

"I believe she knew."

"But was n't she glad to know you were different?"

"I never let her know, really, how different I was."

"You kept it to yourself?"

"It was the only way to keep it."

"Your genius?"

"If you choose to call it that."

"The thing," she said, "that made you different."

"You see," he said, "they did n't understand that *that* was where I was most a coward. I was always afraid of losing it. I am now."

"You could n't lose it."

"I have lost it. It went altogether the time I was working for my medical. I got it back again out in India when I was alone, on the edge of the jungle, when there was n't much cholera about, and I'd nothing to do but think. Then some officious people got me what they called a better berth in Bombay; and it went again."

' She was uncertain now whether he were speaking of his genius, or of something more than it.

"You see," he continued, "you go plodding on with your work for months and never think about it; and then you realize that it's gone, and there's the terror — *the* most awful terror there is — of never getting back to it again. Then there'll be months of holding on to the fringe of it without seeing it — seeing nothing but horrors, hearing them, handling them. Then perhaps, when you've flung yourself down, tired out, where you are, on the chance of sleeping, it's there. And nothing else matters. Nothing else is."

She knew now, though but vaguely and imperfectly, what he meant.

"And the next day one part of you goes about among the horrors, and the other part remains where it got to."

"I see."

Obscurely and with difficulty she saw, she made it out. The thing he spoke of was so inconceivable, so tremendous that at times he was afraid of having it, at times afraid of never having it again. And because, as he had said, the fear of not having it was worse than any fear, he had to be sure of it, he had to put it to the test. So he went down into life, into the thick of it, among all the horrors and the terrors. He knew that if he could do that and carry his vision through it, if it was n't wiped out, if he only saw it once, for a moment afterwards, he would be sure of it. He was n't really sure of it until then, not a bit surer than she was now.

No; he was always sure of it. It was himself he was not sure of; himself that he put to the test.

And it was himself that he had carried through it. He had lived face to face with all the corporeal horrors; he had handled them, tasted them, he, the man without a skin, with every sense, every nerve in him exposed, exquisitely susceptible to torture. And he had come through it all as through a thing insubstantial, a thing that gave way before his soul and its exultant, processional vision of God.

"The absurd thing is that after all I have n't grown a skin. I'm *still* afraid of the sight of blood."

"So I suppose *I* shall go on being afraid."

"Probably. But you won't turn tail any more than I should. *You never ran away.*"

"There are worse things than running away. All the things that go on inside you, the cruel, dreadful things; the cowardices and treacheries. Things that come of never being alone. I have to sit up at night to be alone."

"My child, you must n't. It's simply criminal."

"If I did n't," she said, "I should never get it in."

He understood her to be alluding thus vaguely to her gift.

"I know it's criminal, with Papa depending on me, and yet I do it. Sometimes I'm up half the night, hammering and hammering at my own things; things, I mean, that won't sell, just to gratify my vanity in having done them."

"To satisfy your instinct for perfection. God made you an artist."

She sighed. "He's made me so many things besides. That's where the misery comes in."

"And a precious poor artist you'd be if he had n't, and if the misery did n't come in."

She shook her head, superior in her sad wisdom. "Misery's all very well for the big, tragic people like Nina, who can make something out of it. Why throw it away on a wretched, clever little imp like me?"

"And if *you*'re being hammered at to satisfy an instinct for perfection that you're not aware of ——?"

She shook her head again.

"I'm certainly not aware of it. Still, I can understand that. I mean I can understand an instinct for perfection making shots in the dark and trying things too big for it and their not coming off. But — look at Papa."

She held her hands out helplessly. The gesture smote his heart.

"If Papa had been one of its experiments — but he was n't."

It had got him all right at first. You've no idea how nice Papa was. You've only to look at him now to see how nice he is. But he was clever. Not very clever" (she was n't going to claim too much for him), "but just clever enough. He used to say such funny, queer, delicious things. And he can't say them any more."

She paused and went on gathering vehemence as she went.

"And to go and spoil a thing like that, the thing you'd made as fine as it could be, to tear it to bits and throw the finest bits away — it does n't look like an Instinct for Perfection, does it?"

"The finest bits are n't thrown away. It's what you still have with you, what you see, that's being thrown away — broken up by some impatient, impetuous spiritual energy, as a medium that no longer serves its instinct for perfection. Do you see?"

"I see that you're trying to make me happier about Papa. It's awfully nice of you."

"I'm trying to get you away from a distressing view of the human body. To you a diseased human body is a thing of palpable horror. To me it is simply a medium, an unstable, oscillating medium of impetuous spiritual energies. We're nowhere near understanding the real function of disease. It probably acts as a partial discarnation of the spiritual energies. It's a sign of their approaching freedom. Especially those diseases which are most like death — the horrible diseases that tear down the body from the top, destroying great tracts of brain and nerve tissue, and leaving the viscera exuberant with life. And if you knew the mystery of the building up — why, the growth of an unborn child is more wonderful than you can conceive. But, if you really knew, that would be nothing to the secret — the mystery — the romance of dissolution."

His phrase was luminous to her. It was a violent rent that opened up the darkness that wrapped her.

"If you could see *through* it you'd understand, you'd see that this body, made of the radiant dust of the universe, is a two-fold medium, transmitting the splendour of the universe to us, and our splendour to the universe; that we carry about in every particle of us a spiritual germ which is not the spiritual germ of

our father or our mother or any of our remote ancestors; so that what we take is insignificant beside what we give."

Laura looked grave. "I can't pretend for a moment," she said, "that I understand."

"Think," he said, "think of the body of a new-born baby; think how before its birth that body ran through the whole round of creation in nine months, that not only the life of its parents, but the life of the whole creation was present in the cell it started from. Think how our body comes charged with spiritual energies, indestructible instincts, infinite memories that are not ours; that its life, from minute to minute, goes on by a process of combustion, the explosion of untamable forces, and that we — *we* — unmake the work of millions of æons in a moment, that we charge it with *our* will, *our* instincts, *our* memories, so that there's not an atom of our flesh unpenetrated by spirit, not a cell of our bodies that doesn't hold some spiritual germ of us — so that we multiply our souls in our bodies; and their dust, when they scatter, is the seed of *our* universe, flung heaven knows where."

For a moment the clever imp looked out of Laura's eyes. "Do you know," she said, "it makes me feel as if I had millions and millions of intoxicated brains, all trying to grasp something, and all reeling, and I can't tell whether it's you who are intoxicated, or I. And I want to know how you know about it."

A change passed over his face. It became suddenly still and incommunicable.

"And the only thing I want to know," she wailed, "you won't tell me, and it's all very dim and disagreeable and sad."

"What won't I tell you?"

"What's become of the things that made Papa so adorable?"

"I've been trying to tell you. I've been trying to make you see."

"I can only see that they've gone."

"And I can only see that they exist more exquisitely, more intensely than ever. Too intensely for your senses, or his, to be aware of them."

"Ah ——"

"And I should say the same of a still-born baby that I had never seen alive, or of a lunatic whom I had not once seen sane."

"How do you know?" she reiterated.

"I can't tell you."

"You can't tell me anything, and your very face shuts up when I look at it."

"I can't tell you anything," he said gently. "I can only talk to you like an intoxicated medical student, and it's time for me to go."

She did not seem to have heard him, and they sat silent.

It was as if their silence was a borderland; as if they were both pausing there before they plunged; behind them the unspoken, the unspeakable; before them the edge of perilous speech.

"I'm glad I've seen you," she said at last.

He ignored the valediction of her tone.

"And when am I to see you again?" he said.

This time she did not answer, and he had a profound sense of the pause.

He asked himself now, as they stood (he being aware that they were standing) on the brink of the deep, how far she had ever really accepted his preposterous pretext? Up till now she had appeared to be taking him and his pretext simply, as they came. Her silence, her pause had had no expectation in it. It evidently had not occurred to her that the deep could open up. That was how she had struck him, more and more, as never looking forward, to him or to anything, as being almost afraid to look forward. She regarded life with a profound distrust, as a thing that might turn upon her at any time and hurt her.

He rose and she followed him, holding the lamp to light the stairway. He turned.

"Well," he said, "have you seen enough of me?"

They were outside the threshold now, and she stood there, one arm holding her lamp, the other stretched across the doorway, as if she would keep him from ever entering again.

"Or," said he, "may I come again? Soon?"

"Do," she said, "and bring Nina with you."

She set her lamp on the floor at the stairhead, and backed, backed from him into the darkness of the room.

XXVI

IT was the twenty-seventh of June, Laura's birthday. Tanqueray had proposed that they should celebrate it by a day on Wendover Hill. For the Kiddy's increasing pallor cried piteously for the open air.

Nina was to bring Owen Prothero; and Jane, in Prothero's interests, was to bring Brodrick; and Tanqueray, Laura insisted, was to bring his wife.

Rose had counted the days, the very hours before Laura's birthday. She had plenty to do for once on the morning of the twenty-seventh, making rock cakes and cutting sandwiches and packing them beautifully in a basket. Over-night she had washed and ironed the white blouse she was to wear. The white blouse lay on her bed, wonderful as a thing seen in a happy dream. Rose could hardly permit herself to believe that the dream would come true, and that Tanqueray would really take her.

It all depended on whether Laura could get off. Getting Laura off was the difficulty they encountered every time she had a birthday.

So uncertain was the event that Nina and Prothero called at the house in Albert street before going on to the station. They found Tanqueray, and Rose in her white blouse, waiting outside on the pavement. They heard that Jane Holland was in there with Laura, bringing pressure to bear on the obstinate Kiddy who was bent on the renunciation of her day.

Jane's voice on the landing called to them to come up-stairs. Without them it was impossible, she said, to get Laura off.

The whole house was helping, in a passionate publicity; for every one in it loved Laura. Mr. Baxter, the landlord, was on the staircase, bringing Laura's boots. The maid of all work was leaning out of the window on the landing, brushing Laura's

skirt. A tall girl was standing by the table in the sitting-room. She had a lean, hectic face, and prominent blue eyes under masses of light hair. She was Addy Ranger, the type-writer on the ground-floor, who had come up from her type-writing to see what she could do. She was sewing buttons on Laura's blouse while Jane brought pressure upon Laura. "Of course you're going," Jane was saying. "It's not as if you had a birthday every day."

For Laura still sat at her writing-table, labouring over a paragraph, white lipped and heavy eyed. Shuffling all over the room and round about her was Mr. Gunning. He was pouring out the trouble that had oppressed him for the last four years.

"She won't stop scribbling. It's scribble — scribble — scribble all day long. If I did n't lie awake to stop her she'd be at it all night. I've caught her — in her nightgown. She'll get out of her bed to do it."

"Papa, dear, you know Miss Lempriere and Mr. Prothero?"

His mind adjusted itself instantly to its vision of them. He bowed to each. He was the soul of courtesy and hospitality, and they were his guests; they had come to luncheon.

"Lolly, my dear, have you ordered luncheon? — You must tell Mrs. Baxter to give us a salmon mayonnaise, and a salad and lamb cutlets in aspic. And, Lolly! Tell her to put a bottle of champagne in ice."

For in his blessed state, among the fragments of old splendours that still clung to him, Mr. Gunning had preserved indestructibly his sense of power to offer his friends a bottle of champagne on a suitable occasion, and every occasion now ranked with him as suitable.

"Yes, darling," said Laura, and dashed down a line of her paragraph.

He shuffled feebly toward the door. "I have to see to everything myself," he said. "That child there has no more idea how to order a luncheon than the cat. There should be," he reverted, "lamb cutlets in aspic. I must see to it myself."

He wandered out of the room and in again, driven by his dream.

"Oh," cried Laura, "somebody else must have my birthday. I can't have it. I must sit tight and finish my paragraph."

"You'll spoil it if you do," said Prothero.

"Besides spoiling everybody's day," said Jane judiciously.

That brought Laura round. She reflected that, if she sat tight from ten that evening till two in the morning, she could save their day.

But first she had to finish her paragraph and then to hide it and lock it up. Then she put the pens and ink on a high shelf out of Mr. Gunning's reach. He had been known to make away with the materials of Lolly's detestable occupation when he got the chance. He attributed to it that mysterious, irritating semblance of poverty in which they moved.

He smiled at her, a happy, innocent smile.

"*That's right, that's right.* Put it away, my dear, put it away."

"Yes, Papa," said Laura. She took the blouse from Addy Ranger, and she and Jane Holland disappeared with it into a small inner room. From the voices that came to him Prothero gathered that Jane Holland was "buttoning her up the back."

"Don't say," cried Laura, "that it won't meet!"

"Meet? It'll go twice round you. You don't eat enough." Silence.

"It's no good," he heard Jane Holland say, "not eating. I've tried both."

"I," said Laura in a voice that penetrated, "over-eat. Habitually."

"I must go," said Mr. Gunning, "and find my hat and stick." His idea now was that Laura was going to take him for a walk.

Addy Ranger began to talk to Prothero. He liked Addy. She had an amusing face with a long nose and wide lips, restless and cynical. She confided to him the trouble of her life, the eternal difficulty of finding anywhere a permanent job. Addy's dream was permanence.

Then they talked of Laura.

"Do you know what *her* dream is?" said Addy. "To be able to afford wine, and chicken, and game and things — for him."

"When you think of her work!" said Nina. "It's charming; it's finished, to a point. How on earth does she do it?"

"She sits up half the night to do it," said Prothero; "when he is n't there."

"And it's killing her," said Addy, who had her back to the door.

Mr. Gunning had come in again and he heard her. He gazed at them with a vague sweetness, not understanding what he heard.

Then Laura ran in among them, in a tremendous hurry. She was n't ready yet. It was a maddening, protracted agony, getting Laura off. She had forgotten to lock the cupboard where the whisky was (a shilling's worth in a medicine bottle); and poor Papa might find it. Since he had had his sunstroke you could n't trust him with anything, not even with a jam-pot. Then Addy, at Laura's request, rushed out of the room to find Laura's hat and her handkerchief and her gloves — not the ones with the holes in them. And then Laura looked at her hands.

"Oh," she cried, "*look* at my poor hands. I can't go like that. I *hate* an inky woman."

And she dashed out to wash the ink off.

And then the gloves found by Addy had all holes in them. And at that Laura stamped her foot and said, "Damn!"

The odds against Laura's getting off were frightful.

But she was putting on her hat. She was really ready just as Tanqueray's voice was heard calling on the stairs, "You must hurry up if you want to catch that train." And now they had to deal seriously with Mr. Gunning, who stood expectant, holding his hat and stick.

"Good-bye, Papa dear," said she.

"Am I not to come, too?" said Mr. Gunning.

"Not to-day, dear."

She was kissing him while Jane and Nina waited in the open doorway. Their eyes signed to her to be brave and follow them. But Laura lingered.

Prothero looked at Laura, and Mr. Gunning looked at Prothero. His terrible idea had come back to him at the sight of

the young man, risen, and standing beside Laura for departure.

"Are you going to take my little girl away from me?" he said.

"Poor little Papa, of course he is n't. I'm going with Jane, and Nina. You know Nina?"

"And who," he cried, "is going to take me for my walk?"

He had her there. She wavered.

"Addy's coming in to give you your tea. You like Addy." (He bowed to Miss Ranger with a supreme courtesy.) "And I'll be back in time to see you in your little bed."

She ran off. Addy Ranger took Mr. Gunning very tenderly by the arm and led him to the stairs to see her go.

Outside on the pavement Tanqueray gave way to irritation.

"If," said he, "it would only please Heaven to take that old gentleman to itself."

"It won't," said Nina.

"How she would hate us if she heard us," said Jane.

"There ought to be somebody to take care of 'im," said Rose, moved to compassion. "'E might go off in a fit any day. She can't be easy when 'e's left."

"He *must* be left," said Tanqueray with ferocity.

"Here she is," said Jane.

There she was; and there, too, was her family. For, at the sight of Laura running down-stairs with Prothero after her, Mr. Gunning broke loose from Addy's arm and followed her, perilously followed her. Addy was only just in time to draw him back from the hall door as Prothero closed it.

And then little Laura, outside, heard a cry as of a thing trapped, and betrayed, and utterly abandoned.

"I can't go," she cried. "He thinks I'm leaving him — that I'm never coming back. He always thinks it."

"You know," said Nina, "he never thinks anything for more than five minutes."

"I know — but ——"

Nina caught her by the shoulder. "You stupid Kiddy, you *must* forget him when he is n't there."

"But he is there," said Laura. "I can't leave him."

Between her eyes and Prothero's there passed a look of eternal patience and despair. Rose saw it. She saw how it was with them, and she saw what she could do. She turned back to the door.

"You go," she said. "I'll stay with him."

From the set of her little chin you saw that protest and argument were useless.

"I can take care of him," she said. "I know how."

And as she said it there came into her face a soft flame of joy. For Tanqueray was looking at her, and smiling as he used to smile in the days when he adored her. He was thinking in this moment how adorable she was.

"You may as well let her," he said. "She is n't happy if she can't take care of somebody."

And, as they wondered at her, the door opened and closed again on Rose and her white blouse.

XXVII

THEY found Brodrick waiting for them at the station. Imperturbable, on the platform, he seemed to be holding in leash the Wendover train whose engines were throbbing for flight.

Prothero suffered, painfully, the inevitable introduction. Tanqueray had told him that if he still wanted work on the papers Brodrick was his man. Brodrick had an idea. On the long hill-road going up from Wendover station Prothero, at Tanqueray's suggestion, tried to make himself as civil as possible to Miss Holland.

Tentatively and with infinite precautions Jane laid before him Brodrick's idea. The War Correspondent of the "Morning Telegraph" was coming home invalided from Manchuria. She understood that his place would be offered to Mr. Prothero. Would he care to take it?

He did not answer.

She merely laid the idea before him to look at. He must weigh, she said, the dangers and the risks. From the expression of his face she gathered that these were the last things he would weigh.

And yet he hesitated. She looked at him. His eyes were following the movements of Laura Gunning where, well in front of them, the marvellous Kiddy, in the first wildness of her release from paragraphs, darted and plunged and leaped into the hedges.

Jane allowed some moments to lapse before she spoke again. The war, she said, would not last for ever; and if he took this berth, it would lead almost certainly to a regular job on the "Telegraph" at home.

He saw all that, he said, and he was profoundly grateful.

His eyes, as they turned to her, showed for a moment a film of tears. Then they wandered from her.

He asked if he might think it over and let her know.

"When," she said, "can you let me know?"

"I think," he said, "probably, before the end of the day."

The day was drawing to its end when the group drifted and divided. Brodrick, still imperturbable, took possession of Jane, and Prothero, with his long swinging stride, set off in pursuit of the darting Laura.

Tanqueray, thus left behind with Nina, watched him as he went.

"He's off, Nina. Bolted." His eyes smiled at her, suave, deprecating, delighted eyes and recklessly observant.

"So has Jane," said Nina, with her dangerous irony.

Apart from them and from their irony, Prothero was at last alone with Laura on the top of Wendover Hill. She had ceased to dart and to plunge.

He found for her a hidden place on the green slope, under a tree, and there he stretched himself at her side.

"Do you know," he said, "this is the first time I've seen you out of doors."

"So it is," said she in a strange, even voice.

She drew off her gloves and held out the palms of her hands as if she were bathing them in the pure air. Her face was turned from him and lifted; her nostrils widened; her lips parted; her small breasts heaved; she drank the air like water. To his eyes she was the white image of mortal thirst.

"Is it absolutely necessary for you to live in Camden Town?" he said.

She sat up very straight and stared steadily in front of her, as if she faced, unafraid, the invincible necessity.

"It is, Absolutely." She explained that Baxter, her landlord, had been an old servant of Papa's, and that *the* important thing was to be with people who would be nice to him and not mind, she said, his little ways.

He sighed.

"Do you know what I should do with you if I could have my way? I should turn you into a green garden and keep you there from nine in the morning till nine at night. I should make you walk a mile with me twice a day — not too fast. All the rest of the time you should lie on a couch on a lawn, with a great rose-bush at your head and a bed of violets at your feet. I should bring you something nice to eat every two hours."

"And how much work do you suppose I should get through?"

"Work? You would n't do *any* work for a year at least — if I had my way."

"It's a beautiful dream," said she. She closed her eyes, but whether to shut the dream out or to keep it in he could not say.

"I don't want," she said presently, "to lie on a couch in a garden with roses at my head and violets at my feet, as if I were dead. You don't know how *tre — mend —* ously alive I am."

"I know," he said, "how tremendously alive you'd be if I had my way — if you were happy."

She was still sitting up, nursing her knees, and staring straight in front of her at nothing.

"You don't know what it's like," she said; "the unbearable pathos of Papa."

"It's your pathos that's unbearable."

"Oh don't! Don't be nice to me. I shall hate you if you're nice to me." She paused, staring. "I was unkind to him yesterday. I see how pathetic he is, and yet I'm unkind. I snap like a little devil. You don't know what a devil, what a detestable little devil I can be."

She turned to him, sparing herself no pain in her confession.

"I was cruel to him. It's horrible, like being cruel to a child." The horror of it was in her stare.

"It's your nerves," he said; "it's because you're always frightened." He seemed to meditate before he spoke again.

"How are you going on?"

"You see how."

"I do indeed. It's unbearable to think of your having to endure these things. And I have to stand by and see you at the

end of your tether, hurt and frightened, and to know that I can do nothing for you. If I could have my way you would never be hurt or frightened any more."

As he spoke something gave way in her. It felt like a sudden weakening and collapse of her will, drawing her heart with it.

"But," he went on, "as I can't have my way, the next best thing is — to stand by you."

She struggled as against physical faintness, struggled successfully.

"Since I can't take you out of it," he said, "I shall come and live in Camden Town too."

"You could n't live in Camden Town."

"I can live anywhere I choose. I should n't *see* Camden Town."

"You could n't," she insisted. "And if you could I would n't let you."

"Why not?"

"*Because* — it would n't do."

He smiled.

"It would be all right. I should get a room near you and look after your father."

"It would n't do," she said again. "I could n't let you."

"I can do anything I choose. Your little hands can't stop me."

She looked at him gravely. "Why do you choose it?"

"Because I can choose nothing else."

"Ah, why are you so good to me?"

"*Because*" — he mocked her absurd intonation.

"Don't tell me. It's because you *are* good. You can't help it."

"No; I can't help it."

"But —" she objected, "I'm so horrid. I don't believe in God and I say damn when I'm angry."

"I heard you."

"You said yourself I wanted violets to sweeten me and hammers to soften me — you think I'm so bitter and so hard."

"You know what I think you. And you know," he said, "that I love you."

"You must n't," she whispered. "It's no good."

He seemed not to have heard her. "And some day," he said, "I shall marry you. I'd marry you to-morrow if I'd enough money to buy a hat with."

"It's no use loving me. You can't marry me."

"I know I can't. But it makes no difference."

"No difference?"

"Not to me."

"If you could," she said, "I would n't let you. It would only be one misery more."

"How do you know what it would be?"

"I won't even let you love me. That's misery too."

"You don't know what it is."

"I do know, and I don't want any more of it. I've been hurt with it."

With a low cry of pity and pain he took her in his arms and held her to him.

She writhed and struggled in his clasp. "Don't," she cried, "don't touch me. Let me alone. I can't bear it."

He turned her face to his to find the truth in her eyes. "And yet," he said, "you love me."

"No, no. It's no use," she reiterated; "it's no use. I won't have it. I won't let you love me."

"You can't stop me."

"I can stop you torturing me!"

She was freed from his arms now. She sat up. Her small face was sullen and defiant in its expression of indomitable will.

"Of course," he said, "you can stop me touching you. But it makes no difference. I shall go on caring for you. It's no use struggling and crying against that."

"I shall go on struggling."

"Go on as long as you like. It does n't matter. I can wait."

She rose. "Come," she said. "It's time to be going back."

He obeyed her. When they reached the rise on the station

road they turned and waited for the others to come up with them. They looked back. Their hill was on their left, to their right was the great plain, grey with mist. They stood silent, oppressed by their sense of a sad and sudden beauty. Then with the others they swung down the road to the station.

Before the end of the day Brodrick heard that his offer was accepted.

XXVIII

IT was Tanqueray who took Laura home that night. Prothero parted from her at the station and walked southwards with Nina Lempriere.

"Why did n't you go with her?" she said.

"I could n't have let you walk home by yourself."

"As if I was n't always by myself."

Her voice defied, almost repelled him; but her face turned to him with its involuntary surrender.

He edged himself in beside her with a sudden protective movement, so that his shoulders shielded her from the contact of the passers-by. But the pace he set was terrific.

"You've no idea, Owen, how odd you look careering through the streets."

"Not odder than you, do I? *You* ought to be swinging up a mountain-side, or sitting under an oak-tree. That's how I used to see you."

"Do you remember?"

"I remember the first time I ever saw you, fifteen years ago. I'd gone up the mountain through the wood, looking for wild cats. I was beating my way up through the undergrowth when I came on you. You were above me, hanging by your arms from an oak-tree, swinging yourself from the upper ledge down on to the track. Your hair — you had lots of hair, all tawny — some of it was caught up by the branches, some of it hung over your eyes. They gleamed through it, all round and startled, and there were green lights in them. You dropped at my feet and dashed down the mountain. I had found my wild cat."

"I remember. You frightened me. Your eyes were so queer."

"Not queerer than yours, Nina. Yours had all the enchantment and all the terror of the mountains in them."

"And yours — yours had the terror and the enchantment of a spirit, a human spirit lost in a dream. A beautiful and dreadful dream. I'd forgotten; and now I remember. You look like that now."

"That's your fault, Nina. You make me remember my old dreams."

"Owen," she said, "don't you want to get away? Don't these walls press on you and hurt you?"

They were passing down a side-street, between rows of bare houses, houses with iron shutters and doors closed on the dingy secrets, the mean mysteries of trade; houses of high and solitary lights where some naked window-square hung golden in a wall greyer than the night.

"Not they," he said. "I've lost that sense. Look there — you and I could go slap through all that, and it would n't even close over us; it would simply disappear."

They had come into the lighted Strand. A monstrous hotel rose before them, its masonry pale, insubstantial in the twilight, a delicate framework for its piled and serried squares of light. It showed like a hollow bastion, filled with insurgent fire, flung up to heaven. The buildings on either side of it were mere extensions of its dominion.

"Your sense is a sense I have n't got," said she.

"I lose it sometimes. But it always comes back."

"Is n't it — horrible?"

"No," he said. "It is n't."

They plunged down a steep side-street off the Strand, and turned on to their terrace. He let her in with his latchkey and followed her up-stairs. He stopped at her landing.

"May I come in?" he said. "Or is it too late?"

"It is n't late at all," said she. And he followed her into the room.

He did not see the seat she offered him, but stood leaning his shoulders against the chimneypiece. She knew that he had something to say to her that must be said instantly or not at all. And yet he kept silence. Whatever it was that he had to say it was not an easy thing.

"You'd like some coffee?" she said curtly, by way of breaking his dumb and dangerous mood.

He roused himself almost irritably.

"Thanks, no. Don't bother about it."

She left him and went into the inner room to make it. She was afraid of him; afraid of what she might have to hear. She had the sense of things approaching, of separation, of the snapping of the tense thread of time that bound them for her moment. It was as if she could spin it out by interposing between the moment and its end a series of insignificant acts.

Through the open doors she saw him as he turned and wandered to the bookcase and stood there, apparently absorbed. You would have said that he had come in to look for a book, and that when he had found what he wanted he would go. She saw him take her book, "Tales of the Marches," from its shelf and open it.

She became aware of this as she was about to lift the kettle from the gas-ring burning on the hearth. Her thin sleeve swept the ring. She was stooping, but her face was still raised; her eyes were fixed on Prothero, held by what they saw. The small blue jets of the ring flickered and ran together and soared as her sleeve caught them. Nina made no sound. Prothero turned and saw her standing there by the hearth, motionless, her right arm wrapped in flame.

He leaped to her, and held her tight with her arm against his breast, and beat out the fire with his hands. He dressed the burn and bandaged it with cool, professional dexterity, trembling a little, taking pain from her pain.

"Why did n't you call out?" he said.

"I did n't want you to know."

"You'd have been burnt sooner?"

He had slung her arm in a scarf; and, as he tied the knot on her shoulder, his face was brought close to hers. She turned her head and her eyes met his.

"I'd have let my whole body burn," she whispered, "sooner than hurt — your hands."

His hands dropped from her shoulder. He thrust them into his pockets out of her sight.

She followed him into the outer room, struggling against her sense of his recoil.

"If you had a body like mine," she said, "you'd be glad to get rid of it on any terms." She wondered if he saw through her pitiable attempt to call back the words that had flung themselves upon him.

"There's nothing wrong with your body," he answered coldly.

"No, Owen, nothing; except that I'm tired of it."

"The tiredness will pass. Is that burn hurting you?"

"Not yet. I don't mind it."

He stooped and picked up the book he had dropped in his rush to her. She saw now that he looked at it as a man looks at the thing he loves, and that his hands as they touched it shook with a nervous tremor.

She came and stood by him, without speaking, and he turned and faced her.

"Nina," he said, "why did you write this terrible book? If you had n't written it, I should never have been here."

"That's why, then, is n't it?"

"I suppose so. You *had* to write it, and I *had* to come."

"Yes, Owen," she said gently.

"You brought me here," he said.

"I can't understand it."

"Can't understand what?"

"The fascination I had for you."

He closed the book and laid it down.

"You were my youth, Nina."

He held out his hands toward her, the hands that he had just now withdrawn. She would have taken them, but for the look in his eyes that forbade her to touch him.

"My youth was dumb. It could n't make itself immortal. You did that for it."

"But the people of those tales are not a bit like you."

"No. They *are* me. They are what I was. Your people

are not people, they are not characters, they are incarnate passions."

"So like you," she said, with a resurgence of her irony.

"You don't know me. You don't remember me. But I know and remember you. You asked me once how I knew. That's how. I've been where you were."

He paused.

"If my youth were here, Nina, it would be at your feet. As it is, it rose out of its grave to salute you. It follows you now, sometimes, like an unhappy ghost."

It was as if he had told her that his youth loved her; that she had not gone altogether unclaimed and undesired; she had had her part in him.

Then she remembered that, if she was his youth, Laura was his manhood.

She knew that none of these things were what he had come to say.

He said it lingering in the doorway, after their good-night. He had got to go, he said, next week to Manchuria. Brodrick was sending him.

She stood there staring at him, her haggard face white under the blow. Her mouth opened to speak, but her voice died in her tortured throat.

He turned suddenly from her and went up the stairs. The door fell to between them.

She groped her way about the room as if it were in darkness. When her feet touched the fur of the tiger-skin by the hearth she flung herself down on it. She had no thought in her brain nor any sense of circumstance. It was as if every nerve and pulse in her body were gathered to the one nerve and the one pulse of her heart.

At midnight she dragged herself to her bed, and lay there, stretched out, still and passive to the torture. Every now and then tears cut their way under her eyelids with a pricking pain. Every now and then the burn in her arm bit deeper; but her mind remained dull to this bodily distress. The trouble of her

body, that had so possessed her when Owen laid his hands on her, had passed. She could have judged her pain to be wholly spiritual, its intensity so raised it, so purged it from all passion of flesh and blood.

In the morning the glass showed her a face thinned in one night; the skin, tightened over each high and delicate ridge of bone, had the glaze and flush of grief; her hooded eyes stared at her, red-rimmed, dilated; eyes where desire dies miserably of its own pain. Her body, that had carried itself so superbly, was bowed as if under the scourging of a lash; she held it upright only by an effort of her will. It was incredible that it should ever have been a thing of swift and radiant energy; incredible that its ruin should be an event of yesterday. She lived in an order of time that was all her own, solitary, interminable, not to be measured by any clock or sun. It was there that her undoing was accomplished.

Yet she knew vaguely that he was to sail in six days. Every day he came to her and dressed her burn and bandaged it.

"This thing has got to heal," he said, "before I go."

She saw his going now as her own deed. It was she, not Brodrick, who was sending him to Manchuria. It was she who had pushed him to the choice between poverty and that dangerous exile. It was all done six weeks ago when she handed him over to Jane Holland. She was aware that in his desperate decision Brodrick counted for more than Jane, and Laura Gunning for more than Brodrick; but behind them all she saw herself; behind all their movements her own ruinous impulse was supreme.

She asked herself why she had not obeyed the profounder instinct that had urged her to hold him as long as she had the power to hold? For she had had it. In his supersensual way he had cared for her; and her nature, with all its murkiness, had responded to the supersensual appeal. Her passion for Owen was so finely strung that it exulted in its own reverberance, and thus remained satisfied in its frustration, sublimely heedless of its end. There had been moments when she had felt that nothing could take Owen from her. He was more profoundly part

of her than if they had been joined by the material tie. She was bound to him by bonds so intimately and secretly interwoven that to rupture any one of them would kill her.

She knew that, as a matter of fact, he was not the first. But her experience of Tanqueray was no help to her. Separation from Tanqueray had not killed her; it had made her more alive, with the fierce vitality of passion that bore hatred in its blood. She had no illusion as to the nature of her feelings. Tanqueray had a devil, and it had let loose the unhappy beast that lurked in her. That was all.

Owen, she knew, had seen the lurking thing, but he had not played with it, he had not drawn it; he had had compassion on the beast. And this terrible compassion hung about her now; it kept her writhing. Each day it screwed her nerves tighter to the pitch. She told herself that she preferred a brutality like Tanqueray's which would have made short work of her.

As yet she had kept her head. She was on her guard, her grip to the throat of the beast.

She was now at the end of Owen's last day. He had come and gone. She had endured the touch of his hands upon her for the last time. Her wound was inflamed, and she had had peace for moments while it gnawed into her flesh, a tooth of fire, dominating her secret pain. He had stood beside her, his body touching hers, unaware of the contact, absorbed in his service to her suffering. And as he handled the wound, he had praised her courage.

"It'll hurt like hell," he had said, "before it's done with you. But when it hurts most it's healing."

That night she did not sleep. Neither did he. As she lay in bed she could hear his feet on the floor, pacing his narrow room at the back, above hers.

Her wild beast woke and tore her. She was hardly aware of the sound of his feet overhead. It was indifferent to her as traffic in the street. The throb of it was merged in the steady throb of her passion.

The beast was falling now upon Laura's image and destroying it. It hated Laura as it had once hated Tanqueray. It

hated her white face and virginal body and the pathos that had drawn Owen to her. For the beast, though savage, was not blind. It discerned; it discriminated. In that other time of its unloosing it had not fallen upon Jane; it had known Jane for its fellow, the victim of Tanqueray's devilry. It had pursued Tanqueray and clung to him, and it had turned on him when he beat it back. It could have lain low for ever at Owen's feet and under the pity of his hands. It had no quarrel with spirit. But now that it saw Laura's little body standing between it and Owen, it broke out in the untamed, unrelenting fury of flesh against flesh.

The sound of Owen's feet continued, tramping the floor above her. She sat up and listened. It was not the first time that she had watched with him; that she had kept still there to listen till all her senses streamed into that one sense, and hearing gave the thrill of touch. She had learned to know his mood by his footstep. She knew the swinging, rhythmic tread that beat out the measure of his verse, the slow, lingering tread that marked the procession of his thoughts, and the troubled, jerking tread that shook her nerves, that sent through her, like an agonized pulse, the vibration of his suffering.

It shook her now. She received and endured his trouble.

She had got out of bed and dressed and went up-stairs to Owen's door, and knocked softly. She heard him stride to the door with the impetus of fury; it opened violently, and she swept past him into the room.

His mood softened at the sight of her haggard face and feverish eyes. He stood by the door, holding it so that it sheltered her yet did not shut her in.

"What is it, Nina?" He was contemplating her with a certain sad perplexity, a disturbance that was pure from all embarrassment or surprise. It was as if he had foreseen that she would do this.

"You're ill," he said. "Go down-stairs; I'll come to you."

"I'm not ill and I'm not mad. Please shut that door."

He shut it.

"Won't you sit down?"

She smiled and sat down on his bed, helpless and heedless of herself. Prothero sat on the edge of a packing-case and gazed at her, still with his air of seeing nothing at all remarkable in her behaviour.

Her eyes wandered from him and were caught by the fantastic disorder of the room. On his writing-table a revolver, a microscope, and a case of surgical instruments lay in a litter of manuscripts. A drawer, pulled from its chest, stood on end by the bedside; the contents were strewn at her feet. With a pang of reminiscence she saw there the things that he had worn, the thin, shabby garments of his poverty; and among them a few new things bought yesterday for his journey. An overcoat lay on the bed beside her. He had not had anything like that before. She put out her hand and felt the stuff.

"It ought to have had a fur lining," she said, and began to cry quietly.

He rose and came to her and put his hand on her shoulder. Her sobbing ceased suddenly. She looked up at him and was still, under his touch.

"You don't want to go," she said. "Why are you going?"

"Because I have to. It's the only thing, you see, there is to do."

"If it was n't for me you would n't have to. If you die out there it will be my doing."

"Won't it be the proprietors of the 'Morning Telegraph' who'll be responsible — if I die?"

"I set them on to you."

"Did you? I rather hoped they'd pitched on me because I was the best man for the job."

"The best man — to die?"

"War correspondents don't die. At least they don't set out with that intention."

"You *will* die," she said slowly; "because everything I care for does."

"Why care," he said, "for things that are so bent on dying?"

"I care — because they die."

Her cry was the very voice of mortality and mortality's desire.

Having uttered it she seemed suddenly aware of what she had done.

"Why should n't I tell you that I care for you? What does it matter? That ends it."

She rose.

"I know," she said, "I've broken all the rules. A woman should n't come and tell a man she cares for him."

"Why not?" he said simply.

"I tell you, I don't know why not. I only know that I'm so much more like a man than a woman that the rules for women don't apply. Why should n't I tell you? You know it — as God knows it."

"I know it as a man knows it. I told you I'd been there."

"Owen — shall I ever be where you are now?"

"I had to die first. I told you my youth was dead. That, Nina, was what you cared for."

It was not. Yet she yearned for it — his youth that was made to love her, his youth that returning, a dim ghost, followed her and loved her still.

"No," she said, "it is n't only that."

She paused in her going and knelt down by his half-packed portmanteau. With her free left hand she lifted up, folded and laid smooth the new suit he had flung in and crushed. Her back was now towards him and the door he was about to open.

"Owen," she said, "since I'm breaking all the rules, why can't I go out, too, and look after you?"

He shook his head. "It's not the place for women," he said.

"Women? Have n't I told you that I'm like a man? I'm like you, Owen, if it comes to that."

He smiled. "If you were like me, you'd stay at home."

"What should I stay for?"

"To look after Laura Gunning. That's what you'd want to do, if you were — I. And," he said quietly, "it's what you're going to do."

She rose to her feet and faced him, defying the will that he laid on her.



She had wrung it from him, the thing that six days ago
he had come to her to say

"How do you know? And why should I?"

"Because there's nothing else that you can do for me."

She had wrung it from him, the thing that six days ago he had come to her to say.

XXIX

THAT was a solid, practical idea of Brodrick's. All that he had heard of Owen Prothero connected him securely with foreign countries. By the fact that he had served in South Africa, to say nothing of his years in the Indian Medical Service, he was pointed out as the right man to send to the Russian army in Manchuria; add to this the gift of writing and your War Correspondent was complete. It was further obvious that Prothero could not possibly exist in England on his poems.

At the same time Brodrick was aware that he had reasons for desiring to get the long, ugly poet out of England as soon as possible. His length and his ugliness had not deterred Jane Holland from taking a considerable interest in him. Brodrick's reasons made him feel extremely uncomfortable in offering such a dangerous post as War Correspondent to young Prothero. Therefore when it came to Prothero's accepting it, he did his best to withdraw the offer. It was n't exactly an offer. He had merely mentioned it as a possible opening, a suggestion in the last resort. He pointed out to Prothero the dangers and the risks, among them damage to his trade as a poet. Poets were too precious. There were, he said, heaps of other men.

But Prothero had leaped at it; he had implored Brodrick not to put another man in; and the more he leaped and implored the more Brodrick tried to keep him off it.

But you could n't keep him off. He was mad, apparently, with the sheer lust of danger. He *would* go. "If you do," Brodrick had said finally, "you go at your own risk."

And he had gone, leaving the editor profoundly uncomfortable. Brodrick, in these days, found himself reiterating, "He *would* go, he *would* go." And all the time he felt that he had sent the poor long poet to his death, because of Jane Holland.

He saw a great deal of Jane Holland in the weeks that followed Prothero's departure.

They had reached the first month of autumn, and Jane was sitting out on the lawn in Brodrick's garden. The slender, new-born body of Prothero's Poems lay in her lap. Eddy Heron stretched himself at her feet. Winny hung over her shoulder. Every now and then the child swept back her long hair that brushed Jane's face, in the excitement of her efforts to see what, as she phrased it, Mr. Prothero had done. Opposite them Mrs. Heron and Gertrude Collett sat quietly sewing.

Eddy, who loved to tease his mother, was talking about Jane as if she was n't there.

"I say, Mummy, don't you like her awfully?"

"Of course I like her," said Mrs. Heron, smiling at her son.

"Why do you like me?" said Jane, whose vision of Owen Prothero was again obscured by Winny's hair.

"Why do we like anybody?" said Mrs. Heron, with her inassailable reserve.

"You can't get out of it that way, Mum. You don't just go liking anybody. You like jolly few. We're an awful family for not liking people. Are n't we, Gee-Gee?"

"I did n't know it," said Miss Collett.

"Oh, but Gee-Gee's thinking of Uncle Hugh," said Winny.

Miss Collett's face stiffened. She *was* thinking of him.

"Uncle Hugh? Why, he's worse than any of us. With women — ladies — anyhow."

"Eddy, dear!" said Eddy's mother.

"Well, have you ever seen a lady Uncle Hugh could really stand — except Miss Holland?"

Gertrude bent so low over her work that her face was hidden.

"I say! look at that kid. Can't you take your hair out of Miss Holland's face? She does n't want your horrid hair."

"Yes, I do," said Jane. She was grateful for the veil of Winny's hair.

They had not arrived suddenly, the five of them, at this intimacy. It had developed during the last fortnight, which Jane,

fulfilling a promise, had spent with Dr. Brodrick and Mrs. Heron.

Jane had been ill, and Brodrick had brought her to his brother's house to recover. Dr. Henry had been profoundly interested in her case. So had his sister, Mrs. Heron, and Mr. John Brodrick and Mrs. John, and Sophy Levine and Gertrude Collett, and Winny and Eddy Heron.

Since the day when they had first received her, the Brodricks had established a regular cult of Jane Holland. It had become the prescribed event for Jane to spend every possible Sunday at Putney Heath with the editor of the "Monthly Review." Her friendship with his family had advanced from Sunday to Sunday by slow, well-ordered steps. Jane had no illusions as to its foundation. She knew that Brodrick's family had begun by regarding her as part of Brodrick's property, the most eligible, the most valuable part. It was interested in contemporary talent merely as a thing in which Brodrick had a stake. It had hardly been aware of Jane Holland previous to her appearance in the "Monthly Review." After that it had been obliged to recognize her as a power propitious to the editor's ambition and his dream. For though his family regarded the editor of the "Monthly Review" as a dreamer, a fantastic dreamer, it was glad to think that a Brodrick should have ambition, still more to think that it could afford a dream. They had always insisted upon that, there being no end to the things a Brodrick could afford. They had identified Jane Holland with his dream and his ambition, and were glad again to think that he could afford her. As for her dreadful, her conspicuous celebrity, the uncomfortably staring fact that she was Jane Holland, Jane was aware that it struck them chiefly as reflecting splendour upon Brodrick. But she was aware that her unique merit, her supreme claim, was that she had done a great thing for Brodrick. On that account, if she had been the most obscure, the most unremarkable Jane Holland, they would have felt it incumbent on them to cherish her. They had incurred a grave personal obligation, and could only meet it by that grave personal thing, friendship.

How grave it was, Jane, who had gone into it so lightly, was only just aware. This family had an immense capacity for disapproval; it was awful, as Eddy had observed, for not liking people. It was bound, in its formidable integrity, to disapprove of her. She had felt that she had disarmed its criticism only by becoming ill and making it sorry for her.

She had not been a week in Dr. Brodrick's house before she discovered that these kind people had been sorry for her all the time. They were sorry for her because she had to work hard, because she had no home and no family visible about her. They refused to regard Nina and Laura as a family, or the flat in Kensington Square as in any reasonable sense a home. Jane could see that they were trying to make up to her for the things that she had missed.

And in being sorry for Jane Holland they had lost sight of her celebrity. They had not referred to it since the day, three months ago, when she had first come to them, a brilliant, distracting alien. They were still a little perturbed by the brilliance and distraction, and it was as an alien that she moved among them still.

It was as an alien (she could see it plainly) that they were really sorry for her. They seemed to agree with her in regarding her genius as a thing tacked on to her, a thing disastrous, undesirable. They were anxious to show her that its presence did not destroy for any of them her personal charm. They betrayed their opinion that her charm existed in spite rather than because of it.

Thus, by this shedding of her celebrity, Jane in the houses of the Brodricks had found peace. She was secure from all the destroyers, from the clever little people, from everything that carried with it the dreadful literary taint. Brodrick's family was divinely innocent of the literary taint. The worst that could be said of Brodrick was that he would have liked to have it; but, under his editorial surface, he was clean.

It was in Hugh Brodrick's house, that the immunity, the peace was most profound. Hugh was not gregarious. Tanqueray

could not have more abhorred the social round. He had come near it, he had told her, in his anxiety to know *her*, but his object attained, he had instantly dropped out of it.

She knew where she was with him. In their long, subdued confidences he had given her the sense that she had become the dominant interest, the most important fact in his social life. And that, again, not because of her genius, but, he almost definitely intimated, because of some mystic moral quality in her. He did not intimate that he found her charming. Jane had still serious doubts as to her charm, and Brodrick's monstrous sincerity would have left her to perish of her doubt. She would not have had him different. It was because of *his* moral quality, his sincerity, that she had liked him from the first.

Most certainly she liked him. If she had not liked him she would not have come out so often to Roehampton and Wimbledon and Putney. She could not help but like him when he so liked her, and liked her, not for the things that she had done for literature, not for the things she had done for him, but for her own sake. That was what she had wanted, to be liked for her own sake, to be allowed to be a woman.

Unlike Tanqueray, Brodrick not only allowed her, he positively encouraged her to be a woman. Evidently, in Brodrick's opinion she was just like any other woman. He could see no difference between her and, well, Gertrude Collett. Gertrude, Jane was sure, stood to Brodrick for all that was most essentially and admirably feminine. Why he required so much of Jane's presence when he could have Gertrude Collett's was more than Jane could understand. She was still inclined to her conjecture that he was using her to draw Miss Collett, playing her off against Miss Collett, stinging Miss Collett to the desired frenzy by hanging that admirable woman upon tenter-hooks. That was why Jane felt so safe with him; because, she argued, he could n't do it if he had not felt safe with her. He was not in love with her. He was not even, like Tanqueray, in love with her genius.

If she had had the slightest doubt about his attitude, his behaviour on the day of her arrival had made it stand out sharp

and clear. She had dined at Moor Grange, and Caro Bickersteth had been there. Caro had insisted on dragging Jane's genius from its temporary oblivion, and Brodrick had turned silent and sulky, positively sulky then.

And in that mood he had remained for the two weeks that she had stayed at Roehampton. He had betrayed none of the concern so evidently felt for her by Eddy and Winny and Gertrude Collett and Mrs. Heron and the doctor. They had all contended with each other in taking care of her, in waiting on her hand and foot. But Brodrick, after bringing her there; after, as she said, dumping her down, suddenly and heavily, on his family, Brodrick had refused to compete; he had hung back; he had withdrawn himself from the scene, maintaining his singular sulkiness and silence.

She forgave him, for of course he was disturbed about Gertrude Collett. If he wanted to marry Gertrude, why on earth couldn't he marry her and have done with it? Jane thought.

In order to think better she had closed her eyes. When she opened them again she found Brodrick seated in an opposite chair, quietly regarding her. She was alone with him. The others had all gone.

"I was n't asleep," said Jane.

"I did n't suppose you were," said Brodrick; "if you were reading Prothero."

Brodrick's conscience was beginning to hurt him rather badly. There were moments when he connected Jane's illness with Prothero's departure. He, therefore, by sending Prothero away, was responsible for her illness.

"If you want to read," he said, "I'll go."

"I don't want to read. I want to talk."

"About Prothero?"

"No, not about Mr. Prothero. About that serial——"

"What serial?"

"My serial. Your serial," said she.

Brodrick said he was n't going to talk shop on Sunday. He wanted to forget that there were such things as serials.

"I wish *I* could forget," said she.

She checked the impulse that was urging her to say, "You really ought to marry Gertrude."

"I wish you could," he retorted, with some bitterness.

"How can I?" she replied placably, "when it was the foundation of our delightful friendship?"

Brodrick said it had nothing whatever to do with their friendship.

"Well," said Jane, "if it was n't that it was Hambleby."

At that Brodrick frowned so formidably that Jane could have cried out, "For goodness' sake go and marry her and leave off venting your bad temper upon me."

"It had to be something," said she. "Why should n't it be Hambleby? By the way, George Tanqueray was perfectly right. I was in love with him. I mean, of course, with Hambleby."

"You seem," said Brodrick, "to be in love with him still, as far as I can make out."

"That's why," said Jane, "I can't help feeling that there's something wrong with him. George says you never really know the people you're in love with."

There was a gleam of interest now in Brodrick's face. He was evidently, Jane thought, applying Tanqueray's aphorism to Gertrude.

"It does n't make any difference," he said.

"I should have thought," said she, "it would have made *some*."

"It does n't. If anything, you know them rather better."

"Oh," said she, "it makes *that* difference, does it?"

Again she thought of Gertrude. "I wonder," she said pensively, "if you really know."

"At any rate I know as much as Tanqueray."

"Do I bore you with Tanqueray?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't deny his genius?"

"I don't deny anybody's genius," said Brodrick furiously. Jane looked at him.

"I don't think it's nice of you," said she, "to talk that way to me when I've been so ill."

"You've no right to be ill," said Brodrick, with undiminished rancour.

"I have," said Jane. "A perfect right. I can be as ill as ever I please."

She looked at him again and caught him smiling surreptitiously under his heavy gloom.

"I mean," he said, "you need n't be. You would n't be if you did n't work so hard."

She crumpled her eyelids like one who fails to see.

"If I did n't what?"

"Work so hard."

He really wanted to know whether it was that or Prothero. First it had been Tanqueray, and she had got over Tanqueray. Now he could only suppose that it was Prothero. He would have to wait until she had got over Prothero.

"I like that," said she, "when it's your serial I'm working on."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Brodrick, "that it's that?"

"I was trying to tell you, but you would n't let me talk about it. Not that I wanted to talk about it when the bare idea of it terrifies me. It's awful to have it hanging over me like this."

"Forget it. Forget it," he said.

"I can't. I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of not being able to finish it — of letting you down."

He turned and looked at her intently.

"That's why you've been killing yourself, is it?"

She did not answer.

"I did n't know. I did n't think," he said. "You should have told me."

"It's my fault. I ought to have known. I ought never to have tried."

"Why did you?" His sulkiness, his ferocity, was gone now; he was gentleness itself.

"Because I wanted to please you."

There was an inarticulate murmur from Brodrick, a happy sound.

"Well," he said, "you shan't go on."

"But what can we do?"

"We'll do something. There are plenty of things that can be done."

"But — there's the magazine."

"I don't care," said the editor, "if the abominable thing goes smash."

"What? You can contemplate it's going smash?"

"I can't contemplate your being worried like this."

"It's people that worry me," she said — "if I only could have peace!"

She sketched for him as she had sketched for Tanqueray the horrors brought on her by her celebrity.

"That's London," he said, as Tanqueray had said. "You should live out of it."

"Nothing comes to me in the country."

He pondered a long time upon that saying.

"You wouldn't call this country, would you?" he said at last.

"Oh dear me, no."

"Well — what would you think of Putney or Wimbledon as a compromise?"

"There can't be any compromise."

"Why not? It's what we all have to come to."

"Not I. I can only write if I'm boxed up in my funny little square, with the ash-trees weeping away in the middle."

"I don't wonder," said Brodrick, "that they weep."

"You think it's so terrible?"

"Quite terrible."

She laughed. "Do you remember how you came to see me there?"

"Yes. And how you took me for the man come to tune the piano."

He smiled, remembering it. A bell rang, summoning them,

and he took no notice. He smiled again; and suddenly a great shyness and a terror overcame her.

"Don't you really think," said he, "that this sort of thing is nicer?"

"Oh, incomparably nicer. But is n't it getting rather cold?"

His face darkened. "Do you want to go in?"

"Yes."

They rose and went together into the house.

In the hall, through the open door of the drawing-room, she could see the table laid for tea, and Gertrude sitting at it by herself, waiting for them. His sister and the children had gone. Somehow she knew that he had made them go. They would come back, he explained, with the carriage that was to take her to the station, and they would say good-bye to her before she went.

He evaded the drawing-room door and led the way into his library; and she knew that he meant to have the last hour with her alone.

She paused on the threshold. She knew that if she followed him she would never get away.

"Aren't we going," said she, "to have tea with Miss Collett?"

"Would you rather?"

"Much rather," said she.

"Very well, just as you like," he said stiffly.

He was annoyed again. All through tea-time he sulked, while Jane sustained a difficult conversation with Miss Collett.

Miss Collett had lost much of her beautiful serenity. She was still a charming hostess, but there was a palpable effort about her charm. She looked as if she were beginning to suffer from the strain of Brodrick in his present mood.

What Brodrick's mood was, or was beginning to be, Jane could no longer profess to be unaware. While she talked thin talk to Gertrude about the superiority of Putney Heath to Wimbledon Park, and of Brodrick's house to the houses of the other Brodricks, she was thinking, "This woman was happy in his house before I came. He would have been happy with her if

I had n't come. It would be kinder of me if I were to keep out of it, and let her have her chance."

And when she had said good-bye to Mrs. Heron and the children, and found herself in the doctor's brougham, shut up all alone with Brodrick, she said to herself that it was for the last time. When she let him take her back to Kensington Square, when she let him sit with her there for ten minutes in the half-darkness, she said to herself that it was for the last time. And when he rose suddenly, almost violently, for departure, she knew it was for the last time.

"It was good of you," she said, "to bring me home."

"Do you call *this* a home?" said Brodrick.

"Why not? It's all I want."

"Is it?" he said savagely, and left her.

He was intensely disagreeable; but that also, she told herself, was for the last time.

As long as Brodrick was there she could listen to the voice inside her, murmuring incessantly of last times, and ordering her to keep out of it and let the poor woman have her chance.

But when he was gone another voice, that was there too, told her that she could not keep out of it. She was being drawn in again, into the toils of life. When it had seemed to her that she drew, she was being drawn. She was drawn by all the things that she had cut herself off from, by holding hands, and searching eyes, and unforgotten tendernesses. In the half-darkness of her room the faces she had been living with were all about her. She felt again the brushing of Winny's hair over her cheek. She heard Winny's mother saying that she liked her. She saw Brodrick sitting opposite her, and the look with which he had watched her when he thought she was asleep.

And when the inward admonitory voice reiterated, "Don't be drawn," the other answered, "Whether I'm out of it or in it the poor woman has n't got a chance."

XXX

IT had not occurred to Gertrude that she had a chance. To have calculated chances would have seemed to her the last profanity, so consecrated was her attitude to Brodrick and to all that was Brodrick's. Her chance was, and it always had been, the chance of serving him. She had it. What more, she said to herself, could a woman want?

The peace she had folded round Brodrick wrapped her too. In the quiet hours, measured by the silver-chiming clock, nothing had happened to disturb her beautiful serenity. It was by the cultivation of a beautiful serenity that she had hoped to strengthen her appeal to Brodrick and her position in his house. In the beginning that position had been so fragile and infirm that she had had then no trust in its continuance. Three years ago she had come to him, understanding that she was not to stay. She was a far removed, impoverished cousin of Mrs. John Brodrick's. Hence her claim. They had stretched the point of cousinship to shelter the proprieties so sacred to every Brodrick. He had not wanted her. He preferred a housekeeper who was not a lady, who would not have to be, as he expressed it, all over the place. But he was sorry for the impoverished lady and he had let her come. Then his sister Sophy had urged him to keep her on until he married. Sophy meant until he married the lady she intended him to marry. He had not married that lady nor any other; he was not going to marry at all, he told them. But he had kept Gertrude on.

He had said at the time that he didn't think she would do, but he would try her. He regarded Gertrude with the suspicion a Brodrick invariably entertained for any idea that was not conspicuously his own. But Gertrude had managed, with considerable adroitness, to convince him that she was, after all, his

own idea. And when Sophy Levine triumphed, as a Brodrick invariably did triumph, in the proved perfection of her scheme, he said, Yes, Miss Collett was all right, now that he had trained her. If he approved of Miss Collett it was because she was no longer recognizable as the Miss Collett they had so preposterously thrust on him. He could not have stood her if she had been.

Brodrick was right. Gertrude was not the same woman. She did not even look the same. She had come to Moor Grange lean, scared, utterly pathetic, with a mouth that drooped. So starved of all delight and of all possession was Gertrude that she flushed with pleasure when she heard that she was to have for her very own the little north room where the telephone was now. There was such pathos in her meek withdrawal into that little north room, that Brodrick had n't the heart to keep her in it. The drawing-room, he had intimated, also might be hers, when (it was understood rather than stated) he was n't there himself.

By that time he no longer objected to Gertrude's being all over the place. Brodrick, though he did not know it and his sisters did, was the sort of man who could not be happy without a woman to look after him. Silently, almost furtively, Gertrude made herself indispensable to him. She knew what he wanted before he knew it himself, and was on the spot to supply it. Thus, watching the awful increase of Brodrick's correspondence, as the editor grew great, she was prepared for the coming of a secretary and had forestalled it.

She had kept herself prepared for the coming of a wife, a mistress of Brodrick's house, and by making Brodrick supremely comfortable she had managed to forestall that too. His secretary had become the companion that his housekeeper could not hope to be. Hitherto he had kept Gertrude Collett out of his library as far as possible. Now her intrusion had the consecration of business, and it was even permissible for Gertrude to spend long hours with him in the sanctuary. Brodrick invariably breakfasted alone. This habit and his deadly and perpetual dining out, had been a barrier to all intimacy. But now a large part of his work on the "Monthly Review" could be done at home in the evenings, so that the editor had less time for dining

out. And latterly he had taken to coming home early in the afternoons, when he rather liked to have Gertrude in the drawing-room pouring out tea for him. She filled the place of something that he missed, that he was as yet hardly aware of missing. It seemed to him that he had got used to Gertrude.

He could not think what life would be like without Gertrude, any more than he could think what it would be like with her in a closer and more intimate relation. For none of them had ever suggested that he should marry Gertrude. No Brodrick would have dreamed of marrying his housekeeper. Gertrude would not have dreamed of it herself.

And yet she dreamed. But her dream was of continuance in the silent, veiled adventure, the mystery and religion of her service. Service to Brodrick, perpetual, unwearying service, constituted to her mind the perfect tie. It was the purity of it that she counted as perfection. She desired nothing further than her present surrender to the incorruptible, inassailable passion of service. Whenever, in her dream, she touched the perilous edges of devotion, Gertrude had pulled herself back. She had told herself that she was there for nothing in the world but to save Brodrick, to save him trouble, to save him worry, to save him expense; to save and save and save. That was really what it came to when she saved him from having to keep a secretary.

For Gertrude lived and moved and had her sentimental being in Brodrick. Thus she had laboured at her own destruction. So preoccupied was she with the thought of Brodrick that her trouble, travelling along secret paths of the nerves and brain, had subtly, insensibly communicated itself to him. He grew restless in that atmosphere of unrest. If Gertrude could have kept, inwardly, her visible beautiful serenity, Brodrick, beguiled by the peace she wrapped him in, might have remained indefinitely quiescent. But he had become the centre of a hundred influences, wandering spirits of Gertrude's brain. Irresistibly urging, intangibly irritating, perpetually suggesting, they had prepared him for the dominion of Jane Holland. But Gertrude was not aware of this. Her state, which had begun within a few months of her arrival, remained for three years a secret to

herself. She was before all things a sentimentalist, and she had the sentimentalist's monstrous innocence and boundless capacity for illusion. She shuddered in the grip of mortal renunciation, and called her state holy, when adoration and desire were fused in a burning beatitude at the approach of Brodrick. In her three years' innocence she continued unaware that her emotions had any root in flesh and blood; and Brodrick was not the man to enlighten her. His attitude was such as to nourish and perpetuate her beautiful serenity.

It was with the coming of Jane Holland that disturbance had begun; a trouble so mysterious and profound that, if her conscience probed it, the seat of it remained hidden from the probe. She thought, in her innocence, that she was going to have an illness; but it had not struck her that her symptoms were aggravated by Miss Holland's presence and became intense to excruciation in those hours when she knew that Brodrick and Miss Holland were off together somewhere, and alone. She sickened at the thought, and was unaware that she was sick. This unconsciousness of hers was fostered by all the conventions of her world, a world that veils itself decorously in the presence of the unveiled; and she was further helped by her own anxiety to preserve the perfect attitude, to do the perfect thing.

She was not even aware that she disliked Miss Holland. What she felt was rather a nameless, inexplicable fascination, a charm that fed morbidly on Jane's presence, and, in its strange workings, afflicted her with a perversion of interest and desire in all that concerned Miss Holland. Thus she found herself positively looking forward to Miss Holland's coming, actually absorbed in thinking of her, wondering where she was, and what she was doing when she was not there.

It ended in wonder; for Brodrick was the only person who could have informed her, and he had grown curiously reticent on the subject of Jane Holland. He would say that she was coming, or that she was not coming, on such or such a day. That was all. Her coming on some day or the other was a thing that Gertrude had now to take for granted. She tried to discuss it

eagerly with Brodrick; she dwelt on it with almost affectionate solicitude; you would have said that Brodrick could not have desired it more than she did.

In the last two weeks Gertrude found something ominous in Brodrick's silence and sulkiness. And on this Sunday, the day of Jane's departure, she was no longer able to ignore their significance. Very soon he would come to her and tell her that he did not want her; that she must go; that she must make room for Miss Holland.

That night, after Brodrick had returned from taking Jane Holland home, his secretary came to him in the library. She found him standing by the writing-table, looking intently at something which he held in his hand, something which, as Gertrude appeared to him, he thrust hastily into a drawer.

"May I speak to you a moment?" she said.

"Certainly."

He turned, patient and polite, prepared to deal, as he had dealt before, with some illusory embarrassment of Gertrude's.

"You are not pleased with me," she said, forcing the naked statement through hard lips straight drawn.

"What makes you think so?"

"Your manner has been different."

"Then what you mean is that you are not pleased with my manner. My manner is unfortunate."

He was almost oppressively patient and polite.

"Would it not be better," she said, "for me to go?"

"Certainly not. Unless you want to."

"I don't say that I want to. I say it might be better."

Still, with laborious, weary patience, he protested. He was entirely, absolutely satisfied. He had never dreamed of her going. The idea was preposterous, and it was her own idea, not his.

She looked at him steadily, with eyes prepared to draw truth from him by torture.

"And there is no reason?" she said. "You can think of no reason why it would be better for me to go?"

He hesitated a perceptible instant before he answered her.

"There is no reason," he said; and having said it, he left the room.

He had paused to gather patience in exasperation. Gertrude interpreted the pause as the impressive stop before the final, irrevocable decision; a decision favourable to her continuance.

She was not appeased by it. Her anxiety rather had taken shape, resolving itself into a dreadful suspicion as to the relations between Brodrick and Miss Holland.

He was not thinking of marrying Miss Holland. But there was something between them, something which by no means necessitated her own departure, which indeed rendered superfluous any change in the arrangements she had made so perfect. It was not likely that Brodrick, at his age, should desire to change them. He might be in love with Jane Holland. He was wedded to order and tranquillity and peace. And she never would be. There was wild, queer blood in her. Her writings proved her lawless, defiant, contemptuous of propriety. She had, no doubt, claimed the right of genius to make its own rules.

Gertrude's brain, which had been passive to the situation, now worked with uncontrolled activity. She found herself arguing it out. If it were so, whatever was, or had been, or would be between them, it was transitory. It would run its course and period, and she would remain, and he would return to her. She had only to wait and serve; to serve and wait. It seemed to her then that her passion rose above theirs, white with renunciation, a winged prayer, a bloodless, bodiless longing, subtler than desire, sounding a poignant spiritual cry.

And all the time she knew that her suspicion was not justified. Jane Holland was honest; and as for him, she was not even sure that he cared for her.

Every instinct in her was now subdued to the craving to be sure, to know how far the two were going or had gone. Whatever was between them, it was something that Brodrick desired to conceal, to thrust out of her sight, as he had thrust the thing he had held in his hand.

Up-stairs overhead, she heard the door of his room opening

and shutting. She saw the light from his windows lengthening on the gravel path outside. He was not coming back.

She opened the drawer where she divined that it lurked hidden, the thing that was the sign and symbol of their secret. She found lying there, face downwards, a portrait of Jane Holland, a photograph of the painting by Gisborne. She took it in her hand and looked at the queer, half-plain, half-beautiful, wholly fascinating face; and it was as if she looked for the first time on the face of her own passion, dully, stupidly, not knowing it for the thing it was. She had a sudden vision of their passion, Jane's and Brodrick's, as it would be; she saw the transitory, incarnate thing, flushed in the splendour of its moment, triumphant, exultant and alive.

She laid the portrait in its drawer again, face downwards, and turned from it. And for a moment she stood there, clutching her breasts with her hands, so that she hurt them, giving pain for intolerable pain.

XXXI

NOW that the thing she was afraid of had become a fact, she told herself that she might have known, that she had known it all the time. As she faced it she realized how terribly afraid she had been. She had had foreknowledge of it from the moment when Jane Holland came first into Brodrick's house.

She maintained her policy of silence. It helped her, as if she felt that, by ignoring this thing, by refusing to talk about it, by not admitting that anything so preposterous could be, it did somehow cease to be.

She would have been glad if Brodrick's family could have remained unaware of the situation. But Brodrick's family, by the sheer instinct of self-preservation, was awake to everything that concerned it.

Every Brodrick, once he had passed the privileged years of his minority, knew that grave things were expected of him. It was expected of him, first of all, that he should marry; and that, not with the levity of infatuation, but soberly and seriously, for the good and for the preservation of the race of Brodricks in its perfection. As it happened, in the present generation of Brodricks, not one of them had done what was expected of them, except Sophy. John had fallen in love with a fragile, distinguished lady, and had incontinently married her; and she had borne him no children. Henry, who should have known better, had fallen in love with a lady so excessively fragile that she had died before he could marry her at all. And because of his love for her he had remained unmarried. Frances had set her heart on a rascal who had left her for the governess. And now Hugh, with his Jane Holland, bid fair to be similarly perverse.

For every Brodrick took, not delight, so much as a serious and sober satisfaction, in the thought that he disappointed expectation. Each one believed himself the creature of a solitary and

majestic law. His actions defied prediction. He felt it as an impertinence that anybody, even a Brodrick, should presume to conjecture how a Brodrick would, in any given circumstances, behave. He held it a special prerogative of Brodricks, this capacity for accomplishing the unforeseen. Nobody was surprised when the unforeseen happened; for this family made it a point of honour never to be surprised. The performances of other people, however astounding, however eccentric, appeared to a Brodrick as the facilely calculable working of a law from which a Brodrick was exempt. Whatever another person did, it was always what some Brodrick had expected him to do. Even when Frances's husband ran away with the governess and broke the heart Frances had set on him, it was only what John and Henry and Sophy and Hugh had known would happen if she married him. If it had n't happened to a Brodrick, they would hardly have blamed Heron for his iniquity; it was so inherent in him and predestined.

So, when it seemed likely that Hugh would marry Jane Holland, the Brodricks were careful to conceal from each other that they were unprepared for this event. They discussed it casually, and with less emotion than they had given to the wild project of the magazine.

It was on a Sunday evening at the John Brodricks', shortly after Jane had left Putney.

"It strikes me," said John who began it, "that one way or another Hugh is seeing a great deal of Miss Holland."

"My dear John, why should n't he?" said Frances Heron.

"I'm not saying that he should n't. I'm saying that one way or another, he does."

"He has to see her on business," said Frances.

"Does he see her on business?" inquired John.

"He says he does," said Frances.

"Of course," said the Doctor, "he'd *say* he did."

"Why," said Sophy, "does he say anything at all? That's the suspicious circumstance, to my mind."

"He's evidently aware," said the Doctor, "that something wants explaining."

"So it does," said Sophy; "when Hugh takes to seeing any woman more than once in five months."

"But she's the last woman he'd think of," said Frances.

"It's the last woman a man thinks of that he generally ends by marrying," said John.

"If he'd only think of her," said the Doctor, "he'd be safe enough."

"I know. It's his not thinking," said John; "it's his dashing into it with his eyes shut."

"Do you think," said Frances, "we'd better open his eyes?"

"If you do that," said Levine, "he'll marry her to-morrow."

"Yes," said the Doctor; "much better encourage him, give him his head."

"And fling her at it?" suggested Sophy.

"Well, certainly, if we don't want it to happen, we'd better assume that it will happen."

"Supposing," said Frances presently, "it did happen — what then?"

"My dear Frances, it would be most undesirable," said John.

"By all means," said Levine, "let us take the worst for granted. Then possibly he'll think better of it."

The family, therefore, adopted its characteristic policy of assuming Hugh's intentions to be obvious, of refusing to be surprised or even greatly interested.

Only the Doctor, watching quietly, waited for his moment. It came the next evening when he dropped in to dine with Hugh. He turned the conversation upon Jane Holland, upon her illness, upon its cause and her recovery.

"I should n't be surprised," said he, "if some time or other she was to have a bad nervous break-down."

Hugh laughed. "My dear Henry, you would n't be surprised if everybody had a bad nervous break-down. It's what you're always expecting them to have."

Henry said he *did* expect it in women of Miss Holland's physique, who habitually over-drive their brains beyond the

power of their body. He became excessively professional as he delivered himself on this head.

It was his subject. He was permitted to enlarge upon it from time to time, and Hugh was not in the least surprised at his entering on it now. It was what he had expected of Henry, and he said so.

Henry looked steadily at his brother.

"I have had her," said he, "under very close observation."

"So have I," said Hugh. "You forget that she is an exceptional woman."

"On the contrary, I think her so very exceptional as to be quite abnormal. Geniuses generally are."

"I don't know. For a woman to live absolutely alone, as she does, and thrive on it, and turn out the work she does — It's a pretty fair test of sanity."

"That she should have chosen to do so is itself abnormal."

"It's not a joyous or a desirable life for her, if that's what you mean," said Hugh.

But that was not what the Doctor meant, and he judged it discreet to drop the discussion at that point.

And, as for several weeks he saw and heard no more of Miss Holland, he judged that Hugh had begun to think, and that he had thought better of it.

For the Doctor knew what he was talking about. When a Brodrick meant to marry, he did not lose his head about a woman, he married sanely, soberly and decorously, for the sake of children. It was so that their father had married. It was so that John — well, John had been a little unfortunate. It was so that he, the Doctor —

He stopped short in his reflections, remembering how it was that he had remained unmarried. Like every other Brodrick he had reserved for himself the privilege of the unexpected line.

XXXII

EVERY year, about the middle of August, Brodrick's family dispersed for the summer holidays. Every year, about the middle of September, its return was celebrated at a garden-party given by the Levines.

Brodrick's brother-in-law lived with an extreme simplicity in one of those square white houses in St. John's Wood, houses secluded behind high, mysterious walls, where you entered, as by secret, through a narrow door.

The party had streamed through this door, over the flagged path and through the house, into the small, dark, green garden at the back, a garden that seemed to guard, like the house, its secret and its mystery. There, on this yearly festival, you were certain to find all the Brodricks, packed rather tight among a crowd of Levines and their collaterals from Fitzjohn's Avenue, a crowd of very dark, very large-eyed, very curly-haired persons, persons attired with sobriety, almost with austerity, by way of protest against the notorious excesses of their race.

And with them there was always, on this occasion, a troop of little boys and girls, dark, solemn-eyed little boys and girls, with incredibly curly hair, and strange, unchildlike noses.

Moving restlessly among them, or grouped apart, you came upon friends of the Brodricks and Levines, and here and there a few journalists, conspicuously tired young men who toiled nocturnally on the "Morning Telegraph."

This year it was understood that the party would be brilliant. The young men turned up in large numbers and endeavoured to look for the occasion a little less tired than they were. All the great writers on the "Monthly Review" had been invited and many of them came.

Caro Bickersteth was there; she came early, and Sophy Levine, in a discreet aside, implored her to give her a hand with the

authors. Authors, Sophy intimated, were too much for her, and there would be a lot of them. There was Miss Lempriere and Miss Gunning, and Jane Holland, of course —

“Of course,” said Caro, twinkling.

“And Mr. Tanqueray.”

At that name Caro raised her eyebrows and remarked that Sophy was a lucky lady to get Him, for He never went anywhere. Then Caro became abstracted, wondering why George Tanqueray was coming, and to this particular show.

“Will his wife be here?” she inquired.

“Dear me,” said Sophy, “I never asked her. You don’t somehow think of him as married.”

“I doubt,” said Caro, “if he thinks so of himself. There never was a man who looked it less.”

Most singularly unattached he looked, as he stood there, beside Nina Lempriere and Laura Gunning, drawn to them, but taking hardly more notice of them than of any Brodrick or Levine. He was watching Jinny as she moved about in the party. She had arrived somewhat conspicuously, attended by Brodrick, by Winny Heron and by Eddy, with the two elder little Levines clinging to her gown.

Jane was aware that Nina and Laura were observing her; she was aware of a shade of anxiety in their concentration. Then she knew that Tanqueray was there, too, that he was watching her, that his eyes never left her.

He did not seek her out after their first greeting. He preferred to stand aside and watch her. He had arrived later and he was staying late. Jane felt that it would become her not to stay. But Brodrick would not let her go. He took possession of her. He paraded her as his possession under Tanqueray’s eyes; eyes that were fixed always upon Jane, vigilantly, anxiously, as if he saw her caught in the toils.

An hour passed. The party dwindled and dissolved around them. The strangers were gone. The hordes of Levines had scattered to their houses in Fitzjohn’s Avenue. The little Levines had been gathered away by their nurses from the scene. Only Brodrick and his family remained, and Jane with them

and Tanqueray who kept on looking at the two while he talked vaguely to Levine.

Brodrick's family was not less interested or less observant. It had accepted without surprise what it now recognized as inevitable. It could no longer hope that Hugh would cease from his insane pursuit of Jane Holland, after making the thing thus public, flourishing his intentions in the face of his family. With a dexterity in manœuvre, an audacity, an obstinacy that was all his own, Hugh had resisted every attempt to separate him from Miss Holland. He only let go his hold when Sophy Levine, approaching with an admirable air of innocence in guile, announced that Baby was being put to bed. She suggested that Jane might like to see him in his — well, in his perfection. It was impossible, Sophy maintained, for anybody not to desire above all things to see him.

Up-stairs in the nursery, Winny and Mrs. Heron were worshipping Baby as he lay on the nurse's lap, in his perfection, naked from his bath. Sophy could not wait till he was given up to her. She seized him, in the impatience of maternal passion. She bent over him, hiding her face with his soft body.

Presently her eyes, Sophy's beautiful, loving eyes, looked up at Jane over the child's shoulder, and their gaze had guile as well as love in it. Jane stood before it motionless, impassive, impenetrable.

Winny fell on her knees in a rapture.

"Oh, Miss Holland!" she cried. "Don't you love him?"

Jane admitted that she rather liked him.

"She's a wretch," said Sophy. "Baby duckums, she says she rather likes you."

Baby chuckled as if he appreciated the absurdity of Jane's moderation.

"Oh, don't you want," said Winny, "don't you want to kiss his little feet? Would n't you love to have him for your very own?"

"No, Winny, I should n't know what to do with him."

"Would n't you?" said Mrs. Heron.

"Feel," said Winny, "how soft he is. He's got teeny, teeny

hairs, like down, golden down, just there, on his little back."

Jane stooped and stroked the golden down. And at the touch of the child's body, a fine pain ran from her finger-tips to her heart, and she drew back, as one who feels, for the first time, the touch of life, terrible and tender.

"Oh, Jane," said Sophy, "what are you made of?"

"I wonder——" said Mrs. Heron.

Jane knew that the eyes of the two women were on her, searching her, and that Sophy's eyes were not altogether kind. She continued in her impassivity, smiling a provoking and inscrutable smile.

"She looks," said Sophy, "as if she knew a great deal. And she does n't know, Baby dear, she does n't know anything at all."

"Wait," said Mrs. Heron, "till she's got babies of her own. Then she'll know."

"I know now," said Jane calmly.

"Not you," said Sophy almost fiercely, as she carried the little thing away to his bed beside her own. Winny and the nurse followed her. Jane was alone with Frances Heron.

"No woman," said Frances, "knows anything till she's had a child."

"Oh, you married women!"

"Even a married woman. She does n't know what her love for her husband is until she's held his child at her breast. And she may be as stupid as you please; but she knows more than you."

"I know what she knows—I was born knowing. But if I were married, if I had children, I should know nothing, nothing any more."

Frances was silent.

"They—they'd press up so close to me that I should see nothing—not even them."

"Don't you want them to press?"

"It does n't matter what I want. It's what I see. And they would n't let me see."

"They'd make you feel," said Frances.

"Feel? I should think they would. I should feel *them*, I should feel for them, I should feel nothing else besides."

"But," persisted Frances, "you would feel."

"Do you think I don't?" said Jane.

"Well, there are some things—I don't see how you can—without experience."

"Experience? Experience is no good—the experience you mean—if you're an artist. It spoils you. It ties you hand and foot. It perverts you, twists you, blinds you to everything but yourself and it. I know women—artists—who have never got over their experience, women who'll never do anything again because of it."

"Then, my dear," said Frances, "you would say that geniuses would do very much better not to marry?" Her voice was sweet, but there was a light of sword-play in her eyes.

"I do say it—if they're thinking of their genius."

"Would you say it to Hugh?"

The thrust flashed sharp and straight.

"Why not?" said Jane, lightly parrying the thrust.

Sophy appeared again at that moment and said good-bye. They held her at parting with a gaze that still searched her and found her impenetrable. Their very embrace dismissed her and disapproved.

Tanqueray was waiting for her at the gate. He was going to see her home, he said. He wanted to talk to her. They could walk through Regent's Park towards Baker Street.

They had left the Levines' some way behind them when he turned to her.

"Jinny," he said, "what are you doing in that galley?"

"What are you doing in it yourself, George?"

"I? I came to see you. I was told you would be there. You know, you *do* let yourself in for people."

"Do I?"

"You do. And these Brodricks are n't your sort. No good can come of your being mixed up with them. Why do you do these things?" he persisted.

"They're kind to me," she pleaded.

"Kind? Queer sort of kindness, when you're working yourself to death for that fellow and his magazine."

"I'm not. He'll let me off any day. He said he'd rather his magazine smashed than I did."

"And you believed him?"

"I believed him."

"Then," said Tanqueray, "it's more serious than I thought." His eyes rested on her, their terrible lucidity softened by some veil. "Do you like him, Jinny?" he said.

"Do I like him? Yes."

"Why do you like him?"

"I think, perhaps, because he's good."

"That's how he has you, is it?"

He paused.

"Brodrick does n't know you, Jinny, as I know you."

"That's it," she said. "I wonder if you do."

"I think I do. Better, perhaps, in some ways, than you know yourself."

He was silent for a little time. The sound of his slow feet on the gravel measured the moments of his thought.

"Jinny," he said at last, "I'm going to talk truth to you." Again he paused. "Because I don't think anybody else will."

"There are things," he said, "that are necessary to women like Mrs. Levine and Mrs. Heron, that are not necessary to you. You have moments when your need of these things is such that you think life is n't worth living unless you get them. Those moments are bound to come, because you're human. But they pass. They pass. Especially if you don't attend to them. The real, permanent, indestructible thing in you is the need, the craving, the impulse to create Hamblebys. It can't pass. You know that. What you won't admit is that you're mistaking the temporary, passing impulse for a permanent one. No woman will tell you that it's temporary. They'll all take the sentimental view of it, as you do. Because, Jinny, the devilish thing about it is that, when this folly falls upon a woman, she thinks it's a divine folly."

He looked at her again with the penetrating eyes that saw everything.

"It may be," he said. "It may be. But the chances are it is n't."

"Tanks," she said, "you're very hard on me."

"That's just what I'm not. I'm tenderer to you than you are yourself."

It was hard to take in, the idea of his tenderness to her.

"Think — think, before you're drawn in."

"I am thinking," she said.

Tanqueray's voice insisted. "It's easy to get in; but it is n't so jolly easy to get out."

"And if I don't want," she murmured, "to get out ——?"

He looked at her and smiled, reluctantly, as if compelled by what he saw in her.

"It's your confounded Jinniness!"

At last he had acknowledged it, her quality. He revolted against it, as a thing more provoking, more incorrigible than mere womanhood.

"It'll always tug you one way and your genius another. I'm only asking you which is likely to be stronger?"

"Do I know, George? Do *you* know?"

"I've told you," he said. "I think I do."

XXXIII

THREE weeks later, one afternoon in October, Jane found herself going at a terrific pace through Kensington Gardens. Brodrick had sent word that he would see her at five o'clock, and it wanted but a few minutes of that hour.

When Tanqueray sounded his warning, he did not measure the effect of the illumination that it wrought. The passion he divined in her had had a chance to sleep as long as it was kept in the dark. Now it was wide awake, and superbly aware of itself and of its hour.

After she had parted from him Jane saw clearly how she had been drawn, and why. There was no doubt that the folly had come upon her; the folly that Tanqueray told her she would think divine. She not only thought it divine, she felt it to be divine with a certainty that Tanqueray himself could not take away from her.

Very swiftly the divine folly had come upon her. She could not say precisely at what moment, unless it were three weeks ago, when she had stood dumb before the wise women, smitten by a mortal pang, invaded by an inexplicable helplessness and tenderness. It was then that she had been caught in the toils of life, the snares of the folly.

For all its swiftness, she must have had a premonition of it. That was why she had tried so desperately to build the house of life for Brodrick and Miss Collett. She had laboured at the fantastic, monstrous fabrication, as if in that way only she could save herself.

She had been afraid of it. She had fought it desperately. In the teeth of it she had sat down to write, to perfect a phrase, to finish a paragraph abandoned the night before; and she had found herself meditating on Brodrick's moral beauty.

She knew it for the divine folly by the way it dealt with her.

It made her the victim of preposterous illusions. The entire district round about Putney became for her a land of magic and of splendour. She could not see the word Putney posted on a hoarding without a stirring of the spirit and a beating of the heart. When she closed her eyes she saw in a vision the green grass plots and sinuous gravel walks of Brodrick's garden, she heard as in a vision the silver chiming of the clock, an unearthly clock, measuring immortal hours.

The great wonder of this folly was that it took the place of the creative impulse. Not only did it possess her to the exclusion of all other interests, but the rapture of it was marvellously akin to the creative ecstasy.

It drove her now at a furious pace through the Gardens and along the High Street. It caused her to exult in the face of the great golden October sunset piled high in the west. It made her see Brodrick everywhere. The Gardens were a green paradise with the spirit of Brodrick moving in them like a god. The High Street was a golden road with Brodrick at the end of it. The whole world built itself into a golden shrine for Brodrick. He was coming to see her at five o'clock.

He was not there, in her room, when she arrived. But he had been there so often that he pervaded and dominated the place, as Tanqueray had once dominated and pervaded it. He had created such a habit, such a superstition of himself that his bodily presence was no longer necessary to its support. There was a chair by the fireplace, next the window. She could not see it now without seeing Brodrick, without seeing a look he had, when, as he sat there silent, his eyes had held her, covered her, caressed her. There were times when he had the gestures and the manner of a man sitting by his own fireside, taking her and all that she signified for granted, establishing between them a communion in which the poignant, ultimate things were not said because they were so profoundly felt.

She caught herself smiling now at the things she was going to say to him.

Her bell rang with the dreadful, startling noise that made her heart leap in her breast.

He came in slowly like a man preoccupied with grave business of his own. And at the sight of him Jane's heart, which had leaped so madly, dragged in her breast and drew the tide of her blood after it.

He took her hand, but not with any eagerness. His face was more than ever sombre, as if with some inward darkness and concern. He turned from her and became interested in finding a suitable place for his hat. (Jane noticed that it was a new one.) Then he sat down and remained seated.

He let her get up and cross the room and ring the bell for herself; so fixed was he in his dream. Only, as her gown brushed him in her passing back, he was aware of it and shrank. She heard him draw in a hard breath, and when she looked at him again she saw the sweat standing on his forehead.

"You've hurried," she said.

"I have n't," said Brodrick. "I never hurry."

"Of course not. You never do anything undignified."

That was not one of the things that she had meant to say.

"Never," said Brodrick, "if I can help it." And he wiped his forehead.

Jane caught herself smiling at Brodrick's hat. She felt a sudden melting, enervating tenderness for Brodrick's hat. The passion which, in the circumstances, she could not permit herself to feel for Brodrick, she felt, ridiculously, for Brodrick's hat.

It was, of course, ridiculous, that she, Jane Holland, should feel a passion for a man's hat, a passion that brought her heart into her mouth, so that she could not say any of the things that she had thought of.

Brodrick's hat on an arm-chair beside him was shining in the firelight. On his uncomfortable seat Brodrick lowered and darkened, an incarnate gloom.

"How happy your hat looks," said Jane, smiling at it again.

"I'm glad it amuses you," said Brodrick.

Jane made tea.

He rose, wrapped in his dream, and took his cup from her. He sat down again, in his dream, and put his cup on the arm-

chair and left it there as an offering to the hat. Then, with an immense, sustained politeness, he began to talk.

Now that Hambleby had become a classic; he supposed that her ambition was almost satisfied.

It was so much so, Jane said, that she was tired of hearing about Hambleby. Whereupon Brodrick inquired with positively formidable politeness, how the new serial was getting on.

"Very well," said Jane. "How's the 'Monthly Review'?"

Brodrick intimated that the state of the "Monthly Review" was prosperity itself, and he asked her if she had heard lately from Mr. Prothero?

Jane said that she had had a long letter from Mr. Prothero the other day, and she wished that a suitable appointment could be found for Mr. Prothero at home. Brodrick replied, that, at the moment, he could not think of any appointment more suitable for Mr. Prothero than the one he had already got for him.

Then there was a silence, and when Jane with competitive urbanity inquired after Brodrick's sisters, Brodrick's manner gave her to understand that she had touched on a subject by far too intimate and personal. And while she was wondering what she could say next Brodrick took up his hat and said good-bye and went out hurriedly, he who never hurried.

Jane stood for a moment looking at the seat he had left and the place where his hat had been. And her heart drew its doors together and shut them against Brodrick.

She had heard the sound of him going down her stairs, and the click of the latch at the bottom, and the slamming of the front door; and then, under her windows, his feet on the pavement of the Square. She went to the window, and stared at the weeping ash-trees in the garden and thought of how Brodrick had said that it was no wonder that they wept. And at the memory of his voice she felt a little pricking, wounding pain under her eyelids, the birth-pang of unwilling tears.

There were feet, hurrying feet on the pavement again, and again the bell cried out with its nervous electric scream. Her staircase door was opened quickly and shut again, but Jane heard

nothing until Brodrick stood still in the room and spoke her name.

She turned, and he came forward, and she met him, holding her head high to keep back her tears. She came slowly, with shy feet and with fear in her eyes, and the desire of her heart on her lips, lifting them like wings.

He took her two hands, surrendered to his, and raised and kissed them. For a moment they stood so, held together, without any movement or any speech.

"Jinny," he said thickly, and she looked down and saw her own tears, dreadful drops, rolling off Brodrick's hands.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I did n't mean to do that."

Her hands struggled in his, and for pity he let them go.

"You can't be more surprised at me than I am myself," said she.

"But I'm not surprised," said Brodrick. "I never am."
And still she doubted.

"What did you come back for?"

"This, of course."

He had drawn her to the long seat by the fireplace.

"Why did you go away," she said, "and make me cry?"

"Because, for the first time in my life, I was uncertain."

"Of yourself?" Doubt, dying hard, stabbed her.

"I am never uncertain of myself," said Brodrick.

"Of what, then?"

"Of you."

"But you never told me."

"I've been trying to tell you the whole time."

Yet even in his arms her doubt stirred.

"What are you going to do now?" she whispered.

"You're going to marry me," he said.

He had been certain of it the whole time.

"I thought," she said an hour later, "that you were going to marry Gertrude."

"Oh, so that was it, was it? You were afraid ——"

"I was n't afraid. I knew it was the best thing you could do."

"The best thing I could do? To marry Gertrude?"

"My dear — it would be far, far better than marrying me."

"But I don't want," said he, "to marry Gertrude."

"Of course, *she* does n't want to marry you."

"I never supposed for a moment that she did."

"All the same, I thought it was going to happen."

"If it was going to happen," he said, "it would have happened long ago."

She insisted. "It would have been nicer for you, dear, if it had."

"And when I'd met you afterwards — you think *that* would have been nicer — for all three of us?"

His voice was low, shaken, surcharged and crushed with passion. But he could see things plainly. It was with the certainty, the terrible lucidity of passion that he saw himself. The vision was disastrous to all ideas of integrity, of propriety and honour; it destroyed the long tradition of the Brodricks. But he saw true.

Jane's eyes were searching his while her mouth smiled at him.

"And is it really," she said, "as bad as that?"

"It always is as bad as that, when you're determined to get the thing you want. Luckily for me I've only really wanted one thing."

"One thing?"

"You — or a woman like you. Only there never was a woman like you."

"I see. *That's* why you care for me?"

"Does it matter why?"

"Not a bit. I only wondered."

He looked at her almost as if he also wondered. Then they were silent. Jane was content to let her wonder die, but Brodrick's mind was still groping in obscurity. At last he seemed to have got hold of something, and he spoke.

"Of course, there's your genius, Jinny. If I don't say much about it, you must n't think I don't care."

"Do you? There are moments when *I* hate it."

Her face was set to the mood of hatred.

"Hugh dear, you're a brave man to marry it."

"I would n't marry it, if I did n't think I could look after it."

"You need n't bother. It can look after itself."

She paused, looking down where her finger traced and traced again the pattern of the sofa-cover.

"Did you think I cared for it so frightfully?" she said.

"I know you did."

"I care for it still." She turned to him with her set face.

"But I could kill it if it came between you and me."

XXXIV

JANE had been married for three months, married with a completeness that even Tanqueray had not foreseen. She herself had been unaware of her capacity for surrender. She rejoiced in it like a saint who beholds in himself the mystic, supreme transmutation of desire. One by one there fell from her the things that had stood between her and the object of her adoration.

For the forms of imagination had withdrawn themselves; once visible, audible, tangible, they became evasive, fugitive presences, discernible on some verge between creation and oblivion. This withdrawal had once been her agony, the dissolution of her world; she had struggled against it, striving with a vain and ruinous tension to hold the perishing vision, to preserve it from destruction. Now she contemplated its disappearance with a curious indifference. She had no desire to recover it.

She remembered how she had once regarded the immolation of her genius as the thing of all things most dangerous, most difficult, a form of terrible self-destruction, the sundering of passionate life from life. That sacrifice, she had said, would be the test of her love for Hugh Brodrick. And now, this thing so difficult, so dangerous, so impossible, had accomplished itself without effort and without pain. Her genius had ceased from violence and importunity; it had let go its hold; it no longer moved her.

Nothing moved her but Brodrick; nothing mattered but Brodrick; nothing had the full prestige of reality apart from him. Her heart went out to the things that he had touched or worn; things that were wonderful, adorable, and at the same time absurd. His overcoat hanging in the hall called on her for a caress. Henry, arriving suddenly one afternoon, found her rub-

bing her cheek against its sleeve. His gloves, which had taken on the shape of Brodrick's hands, were things to be stroked tenderly in passing.

And this house that contained him, white-walled, green-shuttered, red-roofed, it wore the high colours of reality; the Heath was drenched in the poignant, tender light of it.

That house on the Heath continued in its incomprehensible beauty. It was not to be approached without excitement, a beating of the heart. She marvelled at the power that, out of things actual and trivial, things ordinary and suburban, had made for her these radiances and immortalities. She could not detect the work of her imagination in the production of this state. It was her senses that were so exquisitely acute. She suffered an exaltation of all the powers of life. Her state was bliss. She loved these hours, measured by the silver-chiming clock. She had discovered that it struck the quarters. She said to herself how odd it was that she could bear to live with a clock that struck the quarters.

She was trying hard to be as punctual and perfect as Gertrude Collett. She had gone to Gertrude to learn the secret of these ordered hours. She had found out from Gertrude what Brodrick liked best for dinner. She had listened humbly while Gertrude read to her and expounded the legend of the sacred Books. She had stood like a child, breathless with attention, when Gertrude unlocked the inner door of the writing-table and showed her the little squat god in his shrine.

She played with this house of Brodrick's like a child, making believe that she adored the little squat god and respected all the paraphernalia of his service. She knew that Gertrude doubted her seriousness and sincerity in relation to the god.

And all the time she was overcome by the pathos of Gertrude who had been so serious and so sincere, who was leaving these things for ever. But though she was sorry for Gertrude, her heart exulted and cried out in her, "Do you think He cares for the little squat god? He cares for nothing in the world but me!"

All would have been well if Brodrick had not committed the grave error of asking to look at the Books, just to see that she had got them all right. Like Gertrude he doubted.

She brought them to him; presenting first the Book marked "Household." He turned from the beginning of this Book to the end. The pages of Gertrude's housekeeping looked like what they were, a perfect and simple system of accounts. Jinny's pages looked like a wild, straggling lyric, flung off in a rapture and meticulously revised.

Brodrick smiled at it—at first.

"At any rate," said she, "it shows how hard I've tried."

For all answer he laid before her Gertrude's flawless work.

"Is it any use trying to bring it up to Gertrude's standard?" she said. "Wouldn't it be better just to accept the fact that she was wonderful?"

(He ignored the suggestion.)

"I suppose you never realized till now how wonderful that woman was?"

Brodrick said gravely he would have to go into it to see.

Brodrick, going in deeper, became very grave. It seemed that each week Jane's expenditure overlapped her allowance with appalling regularity. It was the only regularity she had.

"Have you any idea, Jinny, how it goes?"

She shook her head sadly.

"If it's gone, it's gone. Why should we *seek* to know?"

"Just go into it with me," he said.

She went into it and emerged with an idea.

"It looks," said Jinny, "as if I ate more than Gertrude. Do I?"

Still abstracted, he suggested the advisability of saving.

"Can it be done?" said Jinny.

"It can," said Brodrick, "because Gertrude did it."

"Must I do it?"

"Not if it bothers you. I was only saying it can be done."

"And you'd like it?"

"Well—I should like to know where I am."

"But—darling—It's *so* much better not to."

He sighed. So did Jinny.

"I can see," she said, "what I've done. I've crumpled *all* the rose-leaves, and you'll never be able to lie on them any more."

Then she had another idea.

"Hugh! It's just occurred to me. Talk of saving! I've been saving all the time like fury. I save you Gertrude's salary."

At this Brodrick became angry, as Jane might have seen, only she was too entirely taken up with her discovery to look at him.

"Here I have been working for months, trying how not to be extravagant, and thinking how incompetent I am and how much more advantageous it would have been for you to have married Gertrude. And I come lots cheaper. I really do. Was n't it funny of us never to have thought of it before?"

He was very angry, but he had to smile. Then by way of correction he reminded her that the servants were getting rather slack. Did n't she think it was about time to haul them up?

She did n't. She did n't like the poor things to feel that they were driven. She liked to see happy faces all around her.

"But they're so unpunctual—those faces," Brodrick said. And while they *were* on the subject there was the clock. The clock that Gertrude always used to wind, that Brodrick sometimes forgot to wind, but that Jinny never by any chance wound at all.

"I'm happier," said Jane, "when it's not wound."

"But why——" His face was one vast amazement.

"Because," she said, "it chimes. And it strikes the quarters."

He had thought that was the great merit of his incomparable clock.

She seemed incorrigible. Then, miraculously, for two months all went well, really well.

It was not for nothing that Hambleby sold and was selling. The weekly deficit continued, appalling, palpable even to Jane; but she made it up secretly. Secretly, she seemed to save.

But Brodrick found that out and stopped it. Jane was not

allowed, and she knew it, to use her own income for the house or for anything else but herself and her people. It was n't for that he had married her. Besides, he objected to her method. It was too expensive.

Jane was disposed to argue the matter.

"Don't you see, dear, that it's the price of peace? Peace is the most expensive thing on this earth — any stupid politician will tell you that. If you won't pay for peace, what will you pay for?"

"My dear child, there used to be more peace and considerable less pay when Miss Collett did things."

"Yes. But she was wonderful."

(Her lips lifted at the corners. There was a flash of irony in her tone, this time.)

"Not half so wonderful as you," he said.

"But — Hugh — angel — as long as it's *me* who pays ——"

"That's what I won't have — your paying."

"It's for *my* peace," she said.

"It certainly is n't for mine," said Brodrick.

She considered him pensively. She knew that he did n't care a rap about the little squat god, but he abhorred untidiness — in other people.

"Poor darling — how uncomfy he is, with all his little rose-leaves crumpled under him. Irritating him."

She came and hung over him and stroked his hair till he smiled.

"I told you at the time you ought to have married Gertrude. What on earth possessed you to go and marry me?"

He kissed her, just to show what possessed him.

The question of finance was settled by his going into it again and finding out her awful average and making her an allowance large enough to cover it. And at the end of another two months she came to him in triumph.

"Look there," she said. "I've saved a halfpenny. It is n't much, but it shows that I *can* save when I give my mind to it."

He said he would hang it on his watch-chain and cherish it for ever.

As before, he kissed her. He loved her, as men love a disastrous thing, desperately, because of her divine folly.

In all these things her genius had no part. It was as if they had agreed to ignore it. But people were beginning to talk now of the Event of nineteen-five, the appearance of Hambleby's successor, said to be greater than Hambleby.

She was conscious then of a misgiving, almost a dread. Still, it hardly concerned her. This book was the work of some one unfamiliar, unrecognizable, forgotten by the happy woman that she was. So immense was the separation between Jane Holland and Jane Brodrick.

She was aware of the imminence of her loss without deploring it. She spoke of it to Brodrick.

They were sitting together, one night in June, under the lime-tree on the lawn, only half visible to each other in the falling darkness.

"Would you mind very much," she said, "if I never wrote anything again?"

He turned to her. "What makes you think you can't write? (He too had a misgiving.) You've plenty of time. You've all day, in fact."

"Yes, all day long."

"It's not as if *I* bothered you — I say, *they* don't bother you, do they?"

She understood him as referring to the frequent, the very frequent incursions of his family.

"You must n't let them. You must harden your heart."

"It is n't they. It is n't anybody."

"What is it then?"

"Only that everything's different. I'm different."

He regarded her for a long time. She *was* different. It was part of her queerness, this capacity she had for being different. He could see nothing now but her wild fawn look, the softness and the flush of life. It was his miracle on her.

He remained silent, brooding over it. In the stillness she could hear his deep breathing; she could just discern his face, heavy but tender.

"It does n't mean that you're not well, Jinny?" He remembered that once or twice since he had known her it had meant that.

She smiled. "Oh no, not that."

"It does n't make you unhappy?"

"No, not if — if it was n't for that you cared."

"You know it was n't."

She knew. She had always known it.

They sat silent a long time. Round and about them Brodrick's garden slept, enchanted in darkness. Phantasmal, blanched by the dark, his flowers dreamed on the lawn. An immense tenderness filled her for Brodrick and all things that were his.

At last they rose and went hand in hand, slowly, through the garden towards the house.

Her state was bliss; and yet, through it all she had a sense of estrangement from herself, and of things closing round her.

XXXV

THIS sense came sharply to her one late afternoon in July. She was sitting out in the garden, watching Brodrick as he went his slow and happy rounds. Now and then he paused and straightened a border, or propped some untended plant, top-heavy with bloom, or pinned back some wild arm of a climbing rose flung out to pluck at him as he went by. He could not but be aware that since Gertrude Collett left there had been confusion and disorder in the place she had made perfect.

In these hours of innocent absorption he was oblivious of Jane who watched him.

The garden was still, with that stillness that earth takes at sunsets following hot days; stillness of grass-plots flooded by flat light; stillness of trees and flowers that stand fixed, held by the light, divinely vivid. Jane's vision of her surroundings had never been so radiant and intense. Yet in a moment, by some impenetrable way, her thoughts had wandered back to her solitude in Kensington Square. She saw herself sitting in her room. She was dressed in an old gown that she had worn two years ago, she saw distinctly the fashion and the colour of it, and the little ink-mark on the sleeve. She was writing, this solitary woman, with an extraordinary concentration and rapidity. Jane found herself looking on, fascinated as by the performance of a stranger, admiring as she would have admired a stranger. The solitary woman knew nothing of Hugh Brodrick or of his house at Putney, and cared less; she had a desire and a memory in which he had no part. That seemed to Jane most curious.

Then suddenly she was aware that she, Jane Brodrick, and this woman, Jane Holland, were inseparably and indestructibly one. For a moment her memory and her desire merged with this woman's desire and memory, so that the house and the garden and the figure of her husband became strange to her and

empty of all significance. As for her own presence in the extraordinary scene, she had no longer her vague, delicious wonder at its reality. What she felt was a shock of surprise, of spiritual dislocation. She was positively asking herself, "What am I doing here?"

The wonder passed with a sense of shifting in her brain.

But there was terror for her in this resurgence of her unwedded self. In any settlement of affairs between Jane Holland and Jane Brodrick it would be the younger, the unwedded woman who would demand of the other her account. It was she who was aware, already, of the imminent disaster, the irreparable loss. It was she who suffered when they talked about the genius of Jane Holland.

For they were talking more than ever. In another week it would be upon her, the Great Event of nineteen-five. Her frightful celebrity exposed her, forced her to face the thing she had brought forth and was ashamed to own.

She might have brazened it out somehow but for Nina Lempriere and her book. It appeared, Nina's book, in these hours that tingled with expectation of the terrible Event. In a majestic silence and secrecy it appeared. Jane had heard Tanqueray praise it. "Thank heaven," he said, "there's one of us that's sinless. Nina's genius can lay nothing to her charge." She saw it. Nina's flame was pure. Her hand had virginal strength.

It had not always had it. Her younger work, "Tales of the Marches," showed violence and torture in its strength. It was as if Nina had torn her genius from the fire that destroyed it and had compelled it to create. Her very style moved with the vehemence of her revolt from Tanqueray. But there had been a year between Tanqueray and Owen Prothero. For one year Nina had been immune from the divine folly. And in that year she had produced her sinless masterpiece. No wonder that the Master praised her.

And above the praise Jane heard Nina's voice proclaiming yet again that the law and the condition was virginity, untamed and untamable virginity. And for her, also, was it not the law?

According to her code and Tanqueray's she had sinned a mortal sin. She had conceived and brought forth a book, not by divine compulsion, but because Brodrick wanted a book and she wanted to please Brodrick. Such a desire was the mother of monstrous and unshapen things. In Tanqueray's eyes it was hardly less impure than the commercial taint. Its uncleanness lacked the element of venality; that was all that could be said. She had done violence to her genius. She had constrained the secret and incorruptible will.

It had not suffered all at once. It was still tense with its own young impulse towards creation. In the beginning of the work it moved divinely; it was divinely unaware of her and of her urging.

She could trace the stages of its dissolution.

Nothing that Jane Holland had yet achieved could compare with that beginning. In the middle there was a slight decline from her perfection; further on, a perpetual struggle to recover it; and, towards the end, a frightful collapse of energy. She could put her finger on the place; there, at the close of a page that fairly flared; for the flame, of course, had leaped like mad before it died. It was at that point that she had got ill, and that Brodrick had found her and had taken her away.

After that the sentences came in jerks; they gasped for breath; they reeled and fell; they dragged on, nerveless and bloodless, to an unspeakable exhaustion. Then, as if her genius defied the ultimate corruption, it soared and made itself its own funeral fire. She had finished the thing somehow, and flung it from her as the divine folly came upon her. The wonder was that she should have finished it at all.

And Tanqueray might almost say that she was venal. She had received money for simply committing this crime. She would receive money again for perpetuating it in a more flagrant form. So much down on the awful day of publication; a half-yearly revenue as long as the abominable work endured. There might be a great deal of money in it, as Louis Levine would say. More money than Nina or George Tanqueray had ever made. It was possible, it was more than possible, it was hideously prob-

able that this time she would achieve popularity. It was just the sort of terrible, ironic thing that happened. If it did happen she would not be able to look George Tanqueray in the face.

The date of the Event was fixed now, the fifteenth of July. It was like death. She had never thought of it as a personal experience so long as its hour remained far-off in time. But the terror of it was on her, now that the thing was imminent, that she could count the hours.

The day came, the Birthday, as Brodrick called it, of the Great Book. He had told Tanqueray long ago that it was the biggest thing she had done yet. He bore himself, this husband of Jane's, with an air of triumphant paternity, as if (Tanqueray reflected) he had had a hand in it. He had even sent Tanqueray an early copy. Tanqueray owned that the fellow was justified. He thought he could see very plainly Brodrick's hand, his power over the infatuated Jinny.

By way of celebrating the fifteenth he had asked Tanqueray to dinner.

The Levines were there and the John Brodricks, Dr. Henry Brodrick and Mrs. Heron. But for the presence of the novelist, the birthday dinner was indistinguishable, from any family festival of Brodricks. Solemn it was and ceremonial, yet intimate, relieved by the minute absurdities, the tender follies of people who were, as Tanqueray owned, incomparably untainted. It was Jinny's great merit, after all, that she had not married a man who had the taint. The marvel was how the editor had contrived to carry intact that innocence of his through the horrors of his obscene profession. It argued an incorruptible natural soundness in the man.

And only the supreme levity of innocence could have devised and accomplished this amazing celebration. It took, Tanqueray said to himself, a mind like Brodrick's to be unaware of Jinny's tragedy, to be unaware of Jinny.

He himself was insupportably aware of her, as she sat, doomed and agonizing, in her chair at the head of Brodrick's table.

They had stuck him, of course, at her left, in the place of honour. Unprofitable as he was, they acknowledged him as a

great man. He was there on the ground and on the sanction of his greatness. Nobody else, their manner had suggested, was great enough to be set beside Jinny in her splendid hour. His stature was prized because it gave the measure of hers. He was there also to officiate. He was the high priest of the unspeakable ritual. He would be expected presently to say something, to perform the supreme and final act of consecration.

And for the life of him he could not think of anything to say. The things he thought could not be said while he sat there, at Brodrick's table. Afterwards, perhaps, when he and she were alone, if she insisted.

But she would not insist. Far from it. She would not expect him to say anything. What touched him was her utter absence of any expectation, the candour with which she received his silence as her doom.

The ceremony was growing more and more awful. Champagne had been brought. They were going—he might have foreseen it—they were going to drink to the long life of the Book.

John Brodrick rose first, then Henry, then Levine. They raised their glasses. Jane's terrified eyes met theirs.

"To the Book!" they said. "To the Book!" Tanqueray found himself gazing in agony at his glass where the bubbles danced and glittered, calling him to the toast. For the life of him he could not rise.

Brodrick was drinking now, his eyes fixed upon his wife. And Tanqueray, for the life of him, could not help looking at Jane, to see how she would take it.

She took it well. She faced the torture smiling, with a courage that was proof, if he had wanted proof, of her loyalty to Brodrick. Her smile trembled as it met Brodrick's eyes across the table, and the tenderness of it went to Tanqueray's heart. She held out her glass; and as she raised it she turned and looked full in Tanqueray's face, and smiled again, steadily.

"To the Book!" she said. "To Nina Lempriere's book! You can drink now, George."

He met her look.

"Here's to you. You immortal Jinny."

Lucid and comprehending, over the tilted glass his eyes approved her, adored her. She flushed under the unveiled, deliberate gaze.

"Didn't I get you out of that nicely?" she said, an hour later, outside in the darkening garden, as she paced the terrace with him alone. The others, at Brodrick's suggestion, had left them to their communion. Brodrick's idea evidently was that the novelist would break silence only under cover of the night.

"Yes," he said. "It was like your sweetness."

"You can't say," she continued, "that I'm not appreciated in my family."

Through the dark, as her face flashed towards him, he saw the little devil that sat laughing in her eyes.

"You need n't be afraid to talk about it," she said. "And you need n't lie to me. I know it's a tragedy."

He had never lied to her. It was not in him to fashion for her any tender lie.

"It's worse than a tragedy. It's a sin, Jinny. And that's what I would have saved you from. Other people can sin and not suffer. You can't. There's your tragedy."

She raised her head.

"There shall be no more tragedies."

He went on as if he had not heard her. "It would n't have mattered if it had been bad all through. But neither you nor I, Jinny, have ever written, probably we never shall write, anything to compare with the beginning of that book. My God! To think that there were only six months — six months — between that beginning and that end."

She smiled, saying to herself, "Only six months. Yes. But what months!"

"You've killed a masterpiece," he said, "between you."

"Do you mean Hugh?" she said. "What had he to do with it?"

"He married you."

"My crime was committed before he married me."

"Exactly." She was aware of the queer, nervous, upward jerk of his moustache, precluding the impermissible — "When you were in love with him."

Her face darkened as she turned to him.

"Let's talk about Nina's book. George — there isn't anybody like her. And I knew, I knew she'd do it."

"Did you know that she did it before she saw Prothero?"

"I know."

"And that she's never written a line since?"

"When she does it will be immense. Because of him."

"Possibly. She has n't married him."

"After all, George, if it comes to that, you're married too."

"Yes. But I married a woman who can't do me any harm."

"Could anybody?"

She stood still there, on the terrace, fronting him with the scorn of her question.

He did not answer her at first. His face changed and was silent as his thought. As they paced up and down again he spoke.

"I don't mind, Jinny; if you're happy; if you're really content."

"You see that I am."

Her voice throbbed. He caught the pure, the virginal tremor, and knew it for the vibration of her soul. It stirred in him a subtle, unaccountable pang.

She paused, brooding.

"I shall be," she said, "even if I never do anything again."

"Nothing," he assured her, "can take from you the things you have done. Look at Hambleby. He's enough. After all, Jinny, you might have died young and just left us that. We ought to be glad that, as it is, we've got so much of you."

"So much ——"

Almost he could have said she sighed.

"Nothing can touch Hambleby or the genius that made him."

"George — do you think it'll ever come back to me?"

She stood still again. He was aware now, through her voice,

of something tense, something perturbed and tormented in her soul. He rejoiced, for it was he who had stirred her; it was he who had made her feel.

"Of course," he said, "it'll come back. If you choose — if you let it. But you'll have to pay your price."

She was silent. They talked of other things. Presently the John Brodricks, the Levines and Mrs. Heron came out into the garden and said good-night, and Tanqueray followed them and went.

She found Hugh closeted with Henry in the library where invariably the doctor lingered. Brodrick made a sign to his brother-in-law as she entered.

"Well," he said, "you've had your talk."

"Oh yes, we've had it."

She lay back in her seat as if exhausted by hard physical exercise, supporting the limp length of her arms on the sides of the chair.

The doctor, after a somewhat prolonged observation of her posture, remarked that she should make a point of going to bed at ten.

Brodrick pleaded the Birthday of the Book. And at the memory of the intolerable scene, and of Tanqueray's presence in it, her agony broke out.

"Don't talk about it. I don't want ever to hear of it again."

"What's he been saying to you?" said Brodrick.

"He'd no need to say anything. Do you suppose I don't know? Can't you see how awful it is for me?"

Brodrick raised the eyebrows of innocence amazed.

"It's as if I'd brought something deformed and horrible into the world ——"

The doctor leaned forward, more than ever attentive.

"And you *would* go and drag it out, all of you, when I was sitting there in shame and misery. And before George Tanqueray — How could you?"

"My dear Jinny ——"

Brodrick was leaning forward too now, looking at her with affectionate concern.

Her brother-in-law rose and held out his hand. He detained hers for an appreciable moment, thoughtfully, professionally.

"I think," he said, "really, you'd better go to bed."

Outside in the hall she could hear him talking to Hugh.

"It's physical, it's physical," he said. "It won't do to upset her. You must take great care."

The doctor's voice grew mysterious, then inaudible, and she heard Hugh saying he supposed that it was so; and Henry murmured and mumbled himself away. Outside their voices still retreated with their footsteps, down the garden path, and out at the terrace gate. Hugh was seeing Henry home.

When he came back he found Jane in the library, sitting up for him. She was excited and a little flushed.

"So you've had *your* talk, have you?" she said.

"Yes."

He came to her and put his hands on her forehead.

"Look here. You ought to have gone to bed."

She took his hand and drew him to her.

"Henry does n't think I'm any good," she said.

"Henry's very fond of you."

She shook her head.

"To Henry I'm nothing but a highly interesting neurotic. He watches me as if he were on the look-out for some abnormal manifestation, with that delightful air he has of never being surprised at anything, as if he could calculate the very moment."

"My dear ——"

"I'm used to it. My people took me that way, too. Only they had n't a scientific turn of mind, like Henry. They did n't think it interesting; and they have n't Henry's angelic patience and forbearance. I was the only one of the family, don't you know, who was n't quite sane; and yet—so unlike Henry—they considered me rather more responsible than any of them. I could n't get off anything on the grounds of my insanity."

All the time, while thus tormenting him, she seemed profoundly occupied with the hand she held, caressing it with swift, nervous, tender touches.

"After all," she said, "I have n't turned out so badly; even from Henry's point of view, have I?"

He laughed. "What is Henry's point of view?"

She looked up at him quickly. "You know, and I know that Henry did n't want you to marry me."

The uncaptured hand closed over hers, holding it tighter than she herself could hold.

"No," she said. "I'm not the sort of woman Henry *would* want you to marry. To please Henry ——"

"I did n't marry to please Henry."

"To please Henry you should have married placable flesh and blood, very large and handsome, without a nerve in her body. The sort of woman who has any amount of large and handsome flesh-and-blood children, and lives to have them, thrives on them. That's Henry's idea of the right woman."

He admitted that it had once been his. He had seen his wife that was to be, placable, as Jinny said, sane flesh and blood, the mother of perfect children.

"And so, of course," said Jinny, "you go and marry me."

"Of course," said Brodrick. He said it in the voice she loved.

"Why did n't you marry her? *She* would n't have bothered your life out." She paused. "On the other hand, she would n't have cared for you as I do. That sort of woman only cares for her children."

"Won't you care for them, Jinny?"

"Not as I care for you," said Jinny.

And to his uttermost amazement she bowed her head over his hands and cried.

XXXVI

TANQUERAY'S book was out. Times and seasons mattered little in a case so hopeless. There was no rivalry between George Tanqueray and his contemporaries; therefore his publishers had not scrupled to produce him in the same month as Jane Holland. They handled any work of his with the apathy of despair.

He himself had put from him all financial anxiety when he banked the modest sum, "on account," which was all that he could look for. The perturbing question for him was, not whether his sales would be small or great, but whether this time the greatness of his work would or would not be recognized. He did not suppose for a moment that it would be. *His* tide would never turn.

His first intimation that it was turning came from Jane, in a pencil note enclosed with a newspaper cutting, his first favourable review. "Poor George," she wrote, "you thought you could escape it. But it's coming—it's come. You need n't think you're going to be so very posthumous, after all." He marvelled that Jinny should attach so much importance to the printed word.

But Jinny had foreseen those mighty lunar motions that control the tides. It looked really as if it had come, years before he had expected it, as if (as dear Jinny put it) he would not have a chance of being posthumous. Not only was he aware that this book of his was a masterpiece, but other people were aware. There was one man, even Tanqueray admitted, who cared and knew, whose contemporary opinion carried the prestige of posterity; and he had placed him where he would be placed. And lesser men followed, praising him; some with the constrained and tortured utterances of critics compelled into eating their own words; some with the cold weight of a verdict delivered un-

willingly under judicial pressure. And there were others, lesser still, men who had hated Tanqueray. They postured now in attitudes of prudery and terror; they protested; they proclaimed themselves victims of diabolic power, worshippers of the purity, the sanctity of English letters, constrained to an act of unholy propitiation. They would, if they could, have passed him by.

It was Caro Bickersteth who said of Tanqueray that he played upon the imaginations of his critics as he played upon women's hearts.

And so it went on. One took off a conventional hat to Mr. Tanqueray's sincerity; and one complained of "Mr. Tanqueray's own somewhat undraped attitude toward the naked truth," observing that truth was not nearly so naked as "Mr. Tanqueray would have us think." Another praised "his large undecorated splendour." They split him up into all his attributes and antitheses. They found wonder in his union of tenderness and brutality. They spoke of "the steady beat of his style," and his touch, "the delicate, velvet stroke of the hammer, driven by the purring dynamo." Articles appeared ("The Novels of George Tanqueray;" "George Tanqueray: an Appreciation;" "George Tanqueray: an Apology and a Protest"); with the result that his publishers reported a slight, a very slight improvement in his sales.

Besides this alien tribute there was Caro Bickersteth's large column in the "Morning Telegraph," and Nicky's inspired eulogy in the "Monthly Review." For, somehow, by the eternal irony that pursued him, Nicky's reviews of other people could get in all right, while his own poems never did and never would. And there was the letter that had preceded Jinny's note, the letter that she wrote to him, as she said, "out of the abyss." It brought him to her feet, where he declared he would be glad to remain, whether Jinny's feet were in or out of the abyss.

Rose revived a little under this praise of Tanqueray. Not that she said very much about it to him. She was too hurt by the way he thrust all his reviews into the waste-paper basket, without showing them to her. But she went and picked them out of the waste-paper basket when he was n't looking, and pasted

all the good ones into a book, and burnt all the bad ones in the kitchen fire. And she brought the reviews, and made her boast of him to Aunt and Uncle, and told them of the nice sum of money that his book had "fetched," this time. This was all he had been waiting for, she said, before he took a little house at Hampstead.

For he had taken it at last, that little house. It was one of a terrace of three that stood high above the suburb, close to the elm-tree walk overlooking the West Heath. A diminutive brown-brick house, with jasmine climbing all over it, and a little square of glass laid like a mat in front of it, and a little garden of grass and flower-borders behind. Inside, to be sure, there was n't any drawing-room; for what did Rose want with a drawing-room, she would like to know? But there was a beautiful study for Tanqueray up-stairs, and a little dining-room and a kitchen for Rose below.

Rose had sought counsel in her furnishing; with the result that Tanqueray's study bore a remarkable resemblance to Laura Gunning's room in Camden Town, while Rose's dining-room recalled vividly Mrs. Henderson's dining-room at Fleet.

Though it was such a little house, there had been no difficulty about getting the furniture all in. The awful thing was moving Tanqueray and his books. It was a struggle, a hostile invasion, and it happened on his birthday. And in the middle of it all, when the last packing-case was hardly emptied, and there was n't a carpet laid down anywhere, Tanqueray announced that he had asked some people to dine that night.

"Wot, a dinner-party?" said Rose (she was trying not to cry).

"No, not a party. Only six."

"Six," said Rose, "is a dinner-party."

"Twenty-six might be."

Rose sat down and looked at him and said, "Oh dear, oh dear." But she had begun to smooth her hair in a kind of anticipation.

Then Tanqueray stooped and put his arm around her and kissed her and said it was his birthday. He always did ask

people to dine on his birthday. There would only be the Brodricks and Nicky and Nina Lempriere and Laura Gunning — No, Laura Gunning could n't come. That, with themselves, made six.

"Well ——" said Rose placidly.

"I can take them to a restaurant if you'd rather. But I thought it would be so nice to have them in our own house. When it's my birthday."

She smiled. She was taking it all in. In her eyes, for once, he was like a child, with his birthday and his party. How could she refuse him anything on his birthday? And all through the removal he had been so good.

Already she was measuring spaces with her eye.

"It'll 'old six," she said — "squeezin'."

She sat silent, contemplating in a vision the right sequence of the dinner.

"There must be soup," she said, "an' fish, an' a hongtry an' a joint, an' a puddin' an' a sav'ry, an' dessert to follow."

"Oh Lord, no. Give 'em bread and cheese. They're none of 'em greedy."

"I'll give you something better than that," said Rose; "on your birthday — the idea!"

Dinner was to be at eight o'clock. The lateness of the hour enabled Mr. and Mrs. Eldred to come up and give a hand with the waiting and the dishing-up. They had softened towards Tanqueray since he had taken that little house. That he should give a dinner-party in it during the middle of the removal was no more than they expected of his eccentricity.

The dinner went off very well. Rose was charming in a pink silk blouse with lace at her throat and wrists. Her face too was pink with a flush of anxiety and excitement. As for George, she had never seen him look so handsome. She could hardly take her eyes off him, as he sat there in his beautiful evening suit and white shirt-front. He was enjoying his birthday like a child, and laughing — she had never heard him laugh like that in her life before. He laughed most at the very things she thought would vex him, the little accidents, such as the sliding

of all the dinner-plates from Mr. Nicholson's hands on to the floor at Uncle's feet in the doorway, and Uncle's slamming of the door upon the fragments. The dinner, too; she had been afraid that George would n't like all his friends to know she'd cooked it. But he told them all straight out, laughing, and asking them if she was n't very clever? And they all said that she was, and that her dinner was delicious; even the dishes that she had worried and trembled over. And though she had cooked the dinner, she had n't got to wait. Not one of the gentlemen would let her. Rose became quite gay with her small triumph, and by the time the sweets came she felt that she could talk a little.

For Nicky was the perfection of admirable behaviour. His right ear, patient and attentive, leaned toward Tanqueray's wife, while his left strained in agony to catch what Tanqueray was saying. Tanqueray was talking to Jane. He had said he supposed she had seen the way "they had been going for him," and she had asked him was it possible he minded?

"Minded? After your letter? When a big full-fledged archangel gets up on the tips of its toes, and spreads its gorgeous wings in front of me, and sings a hymn of praise out loud in my face, do you think I hear the little beasts snarling at my feet and snapping at the calves of my legs?"

Rose at Nicky's right was saying, "It's over small for a dinin'-room. But you should see 'is study."

He bowed an ear that did not hear her.

"Nicky did me well," said Tanqueray.

"I told you all the time," said Jane, "that Nicky knew."

"'E could n't do anything without 'is study."

"Ah?" Nicky returned to the little woman, all attention.

"Are n't you proud of him? Isn't it splendid how he's brought them round? How they're all praising him?"

"So they'd ought to," Rose said. "'E's worked 'ard enough for it. The way 'e works! He'll sit think-thinkin' for hours, before 'e seems as if 'e could get fair hold of a word ——"

They had all stopped talking to Tanqueray and were listening to Tanqueray's wife.

"Then 'e'll start writin', slow-like; and 'e'll go over it again and again, a-scratchin' out and a-scratchin' out, till all 'is papers is a marsh of ink; and 'e'll 'ave to write all that over again. And the study and the care 'e gives to it you'd never think."

Nicky's ear leaned closer than ever, as if to shelter and protect her; and Rose became aware that George's forehead was lowering upon her from the other end of the table and trying to scowl her into silence.

After that Rose talked no more. She sat wondering miserably what it was that she had done. It did not occur to her that what had annoyed him was her vivid revelation of his method. The dinner she was enjoying so much had suddenly become dreadful to her.

Her wonder and her dread still weighed on her, long after it was over, when she was showing Mrs. Brodrick the house. Her joy and her pride in it were dashed. Over all the house there hung the shadow of George's awful scowl. It seemed to her that George's scowl must have had something to do with Mrs. Brodrick; that she must have shamed him in some way before the lady he thought so much of, who thought so much of him. A little too much, Rose said to herself, seeing that she was a married woman.

And for the first time there crept into Rose's obscurely suffering soul, a fear and a jealousy of Mrs. Brodrick.

Jane felt it, and divined beneath it the suffering that was its cause. It was not as if she had not known how George could make a woman suffer.

Her acutest sense of it came to her as they stood together in the bedroom that she had been called on to admire. Rose's bedroom was a wonder of whiteness; so was the great smooth double bed; but the smoothest and the whitest thing in it was Tanqueray's pillow where Tanqueray's head had never lain. There was a tiny dressing-room beyond, and through the open door Jane caught a sight of the low camp-bed where, night after night, Tanqueray's genius flung its victim down to sleep off the orgy of the day's work. The dressing-room was a place where he could hide from Rose by night as he hid from her by day.

And Rose, when they took the house, had been so proud of the dressing-room.

Jane, seeing these things, resolved to remove the fear and jealousy. She must let Rose see that she was not dangerous; and she knew how.

She began by asking Rose when she was coming out to Putney? And Rose answered that she was busy and could n't say for sure.

"You won't be busy in August, will you? If you'll come then I'll show you a room you have n't seen, the prettiest room in the house."

Rose drew in her breath. Her face had all the soft flush in it that came when she was deeply moved.

"I've got some of its dear little things all ready for it now," said Jane. "You must see them."

"I should dearly love to."

"I never thought, Rose, that I should have it."

Rose meditated. "They come," said she, "mostly to them that does n't think."

"There's only one thing, Rose. I'm afraid. Oh, I'm so dreadfully afraid."

"I should n't be afraid," said Rose, "if it was me."

"It's because I've been so happy."

"You'll be 'appier still when it's come. It'd make all the difference to me if I 'ad a child. But that's what I have n't and never shall have."

"You don't know. You don't know."

"Yes. I do know." Rose's mouth trembled. She glanced unaware at the pillow that lay so smooth beside her own. "I 'ave n't let on to him how much I want it. I would n't" (Rose steadied her mouth to get the words out). "Not if it was ever so."

"You darling," said Jane, and kissed her, and at that Rose burst into tears.

"I ought n't to be keeping you here," she said. And they left the bedroom.

"Are n't you coming in?" said Jane.

Rose had turned away from her at Tanqueray's door.

"I can't," she whispered. "Not with me eyes all swelled up like this."

She went down-stairs to her little kitchen, where in the half-darkness she crouched down beside Minny who, with humped shoulders and head that nodded to the fender, dozed before the fire.

XXXVII

LAURA GUNNING was writing a letter to Tanqueray to congratulate him on his book and to explain why she had not come to his birthday party. It was simply impossible to get off now. Papa, she said, could n't be left for five minutes, not even with the morning paper.

It was frightfully hard work getting all this into any intelligible form of words; getting it down at all was difficult. For the last hour she had been sitting there, starting and trembling at each rustle of the paper. Mr. Gunning could not settle down to reading now. He turned his paper over and over again in the vain search for distraction; he divided it into parts and became entangled in them; now he would cast them from him and trample them under his feet; and now they would be flapping about his head; he would be covered and utterly concealed in newspaper.

It was a perpetual wind of newspaper, now high, now low; small, creeping sounds that rose to a crescendo; rushing, ripping, shrieking sounds of agitated newspaper, lacerating Laura's nerves, and murderous to the rhythm of her prose.

Tears fell from Laura's eyes as she wrote; they dropped, disfiguring her letter. Her head ached. It was always aching now. And when she tried to write she felt as if she were weaving string out of the grey matter of her brain, with the thread breaking all the time.

At four o'clock she rose wearily and began to get tea ready. Nina was coming to tea that afternoon. It was something to look forward to, something that would stave off the pressure and the pain.

Her tether had stretched; it had given her inches; but this was the end of it. She did not see, herself, now, any more than Nina or Jane or Tanqueray saw, how she was to go on.

She did not know how, for instance, she was to face the terrible question of finance. For the last six months she had not written any paragraphs. Even if Papa had not made it impossible for her to write them, her head and all the ideas in it were giving out. She had lost her job. She was living precariously on translation, which could be done, she maintained, when you had n't any head at all. She would get twenty pounds for it, and there would be forty, perhaps, for the book which she had been sitting up to write. She did not know where the money for next year was coming from; and there were the doctor and the chemist now to pay for poor Papa.

The doctor and the chemist had not cured him of his dreams. The dreams were incessant, and they were more horrid than they had ever been. She had n't slept for fear of the opening of the door, and the sound of the slow feet shuffling to her bedside, and the face that took on more and more the likeness of the horrors that he dreamed.

The dreams, she had gathered, were a very bad sign. She had been told that she must be on the look-out; she must not leave him. She knew what that meant. Her fear might take shape any day or any night.

Last night she had moved her bed into his room.

The doctor had looked grave when she told him what she had done. There should be, he said, an attendant for the night. To be on the look-out night and day were too much for any woman. She should husband her strength, for she would want it. She was in for a very long strain. For the old man's bodily health was marvellous. He might last like that for another ten years, and, with care, for longer.

Nina had been drawn apart into the inner room to receive this account of Mr. Gunning. She was shocked by the change she found in her little friend. The Kiddy was very thin. Her pretty, slender neck was wasted, and her child-like wrists were flattened to the bone. A sallow tint was staining her whiteness. Her hair no longer waved in its low curves; it fell flat and limp from the parting. Her eyes, strained, fixed in their fear, showed a rim of white. Her mouth was set tight in defiance of her fear.

Nina noticed that there was a faint, sagging mark on either side of it.

"Kiddy," she said, "how *will* you ——?"

"I don't know. My brain's all woolly and it won't think."

Laura closed her eyes; a way she had when she faced terror.

"Nina, it was horrible yesterday. I caught myself wishing —— Oh no, I don't; I did n't; I could n't; it was something else, not me. It could n't have been me, could it?"

"No, Kiddy, of course it could n't."

"I don't know. I feel sometimes as if I could be awful. Yesterday, I did a cruel thing to him. I took his newspaper away from him."

She stared, agonized, as if her words were being wrenched from her with each turn of a rack.

"I hid it. And he cried, Nina, he cried."

Her sad eyes fastened on Nina's; they clung, straining at the hope they saw in Nina's pity.

"I can't think how I did it. I could n't stand it, you know — the rustling."

"Kiddy," said Nina, "you're going to pieces."

Laura shook her head. "Oh no. If I could have peace; If I could only have peace, for three days."

"You must have it. You must go away."

"How can I go and leave him?"

"Tank's wife would come."

"Three days." It seemed as if she were considering it, as if her mind, drowning, snatched at that straw.

She let it go. "No. It's no use going away. It would make no difference."

She turned her face from Nina. "In some ways," she said, "it's a good thing I've got Papa to think of."

Nina was silent. She knew what Laura meant.

XXXVIII

THEY had preserved as by a compact a perpetual silence on the subject of Owen Prothero. But always, after seeing Laura, Nina had forced herself to write to him that he might know she had been true to her trust.

To-night she wrote: "I have done all I can for you, or, if you like, for Laura. She's at the breaking point. If you think there's anything you can do for her yourself you'd better do it and lose no time."

She wrote brutally; for mixed with her jealousy there was a savage anger with Owen as the cause of Laura's suffering. She hated the Kiddy, but she could n't bear to see her suffer.

There were two days yet before the mail went; but she posted her letter at once, while her nerve held out. The thing done, she sat up till midnight brooding over it. It had taken all her nerve. For she did not want Prothero to come back, and that letter would bring him. Bodily separation from Owen had not killed her; it had become the very condition of her life; for there was a soul of soundness in her. Her blood, so vehement in its course, had the saving impetus of recoil.

She dreaded its dominion as the whipped slave dreads the lash.

Latterly she had detached herself even spiritually from Owen. She remembered what she had been before, without him, and what, without him, she had possessed. Her genius was a thing utterly removed from her, a thing that belonged to Owen rather than to her, since he had said it was his youth. She thought of it tenderly, as of a thing done for and departed; for it was so that she had come to think of Owen's youth. She was not like Jane, she felt no hatred of it and no jealousy. It had not given her cause. It had not stood in her way. It had not struggled in her against her passion. If it had, she knew that she would

have swept it aside and crushed it. It had lain always at the mercy of her passions; she had given it to her passions to destroy, foreseeing the destruction. But now she relented. She felt that she would save it if she could.

It was in her hour of sanity and insight that she had said virginity was the law, the indispensable condition. Virginity — she had always seen it, not as a fragile, frustrate thing, but as a joyous, triumphing energy, the cold, wild sister of mountain winds and leaping waters, subservient only to her genius, guarding the flame in its secret, unsundered heart.

Her genius was the genius of wild earth, an immortal of divinely pitiful virgin heart and healing hand; clear-eyed, swift-footed, a huntress of the woods and the mountains, a runner in the earth's green depths, in the secret, enchanted ways. To follow it was to know joy and deliverance and peace. It was the one thing that had not betrayed her.

There had been moments, lately, when she had had almost the assurance of its ultimate return; when she had felt the stirring of the old impulse, the immortal instinct; when she longed for the rushing of her rivers, and the race of the wind on her mountains of the Marches. It would come back, her power, if she were there, in the place where it was born; if she could get away from streets and houses and people; if she got away from Laura.

But Laura was the one thing she could not get away from. She had to be faithful to her trust.

It would be seven weeks, at the least, before Owen could come back. Her letter would take three weeks to reach him, and he would have to make arrangements. She wondered whether the Kiddy could hold out so long.

All night she was tormented by this fear, of the Kiddy's not holding out, of her just missing it; of every week being one more nail hammered, as she had once said, into the Kiddy's little coffin; and it was with a poignant premonition that she received a message from Addy Ranger in the morning. Miss Ranger was down-stairs; she had something to say to Miss Lempriere; she must see her. She could n't come up; she had n't a minute.

Addy stood outside on the doorstep. She was always in a violent hurry when on her way to Fleet Street, the scene for the time being of her job. But this morning her face showed signs of a profounder agitation. She made a rush at Nina.

"Oh, Miss Lempriere, will you go to Laura?"

"Is she ill?"

"No. *He* is. He's dying. He's in a fit. I think it's killing her."

The blinds were down when Nina reached the house in Camden Town.

The fit — it was apoplexy, Mrs. Baxter informed her — had not been long. It had come on, mercifully, in his sleep. Mercifully (Mrs. Baxter leant on it); but Miss Lempriere had better go up at once to Miss Gunning.

Nina went without a word.

The bed had been drawn into the middle of the small back room. The body of the old man lay on it, covered with a sheet. His head was tilted a little, showing the prone arch of the peaked nose; the jaw was bound with a handkerchief. Already the features were as they had been in the days before disease had touched them. Death had constrained them to their primal sanity. Death dominated them like a living soul.

The death-bed and its burden filled the room. In the narrow space between it and the wall little Laura went to and fro, to and fro, looking for a pair of white socks that were not there and never had been. She must find, she was saying, a pair of white socks, of clean white socks. They had told her that they were necessary.

XXXIX

IT was on the thirtieth of July that Laura's father died. Three weeks later Laura was living in the room in Adelphi Terrace which had been Owen Prothero's. Nina had taken her away from the house in Camden Town, where she had sat alone with her grief and remorse and the intolerable memory of her fear. They said that her mind would give way if she were left there.

And now, secretly and in a night, her trouble had passed from her. Lying there in Owen's room, on his bed, held as in shelter by the walls that had held him, there had come to her a strange and intimate sense of his presence. More strangely and more intimately still, it assured her of her father's presence and continuance, of it being as Owen had said. The wind from the river passed over her, lying there. It felt like an aura of immortality.

After that night the return of her bodily health was rapid, a matter of three days; and they said of her that this marvellous recovery was due to the old man's death, to her release from the tension.

Late one afternoon she was sitting by herself at Owen's window that looked out to the sky. Outside the rain streamed in a grey mist to the streets and the river. At the sound of it her heart lifted with a sudden wildness and tremor. She started when Nina opened the door and came to her, haggard and unsmiling.

Nina was telling her twice over to go down-stairs. There was somebody there who had come to see her. When she asked who it was, Nina answered curtly that she, Laura, knew.

Laura went down to Nina's room, the room that looked over the river.

Prothero stood by the window with his back to the light.

She gave a low sobbing cry of joy and fear, and stayed where she had entered; and he strode forward and took her in his arms. He held her for a long moment, bending to her, his lips pressed to hers, till she drew back her face suddenly and looked at him.

"Do you know? Has Nina told you?"

"I knew three weeks ago."

"Did she wire?"

"Nobody wired."

"Why have you come, then?"

"*You* sent for me."

"Oh no, no. It was n't I. I could n't. How could you think I would?"

"Why could n't you?"

"It would have been," she said, "a dreadful thing to do."

"That dreadful thing is what you did. I heard you all night — the night of the thirtieth; you were crying to me. And in the morning I saw you."

"You saw me?"

"I saw you in a little room that I've never seen you in. You were going up and down in it, with your hands held out, like this, in front of you. You were looking for something. And I knew that I had to come."

"And you came," she said, "just for that?"

"I came — just for that."

An hour later he was alone for a moment with Nina. She had come in with her hat and jacket on.

"Do you mind," she said, "if I go out? I've *got* to go."

There was nothing to be said. He knew the nature of her necessity, and she knew that he knew. She stood confronting him and his knowledge with a face that never flinched. His eyes protested, with that eternal tenderness of his that had been her undoing. She steadied her voice under it.

"I want you to know, Owen, that I sent for you."

"It was like your goodness."

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "There was nothing else," she said, "that I could do."

That night, while Prothero and Laura sat together holding each other's hands, Nina walked up and down outside on the Embankment, in the rain. She had said that she was more like a man than a woman; and with her stride that gave her garments recklessly to the rain, with her impetuous poise, and hooded, hungry eyes, she had the look of some lean and vehement adolescent, driven there by his youth.

The next day, very early, she went down into Wales, a virgin to her mountains.

She had done all she could.

XL

L AURA was staying at the Brodricks. She was to stay, Jane insisted on it, until she was married. She would have to stay for ever then, Laura said. Her marriage seemed so far-off, so unlikely, so impossible.

For Prothero had offended the powers that governed his material destiny, the editors and proprietors of the "Morning Telegraph." A man who, without a moment's notice, could fling up his appointment, an appointment, mind you, that he had obtained, not by any merit of his own, but through the grace and favour of an editor's wife, an appointment that he held precariously, almost on sufferance, by mercy extended to him day by day and hour by hour, what could he hope for from sane, responsible men like Brodrick and Levine? Did he imagine that appointments hung on lamp-posts ready to his hand? Or that they only waited for his appearance, to fall instantly upon his head. And that, if they did fall on his head, he could take them on and off like his hat? And did he think that he could play the fool with a paper like the "Morning Telegraph"?

These questions Brodrick asked of Levine and Levine of Brodrick, before the unspeakably shocked, the unconditionally assenting faces of John and Henry.

All the Brodricks disapproved of Prothero and were annoyed with him for flinging up his appointment. Jane pleaded that he had flung it up because he was fond of Laura and wanted to marry her; and she was told that that was all the more reason why he should have stuck to it. They were annoyed with him for keeping Laura hanging on when he knew he could n't marry her; and they were annoyed with him for wanting to marry her at all. They admitted that it was very sad for Laura; they

liked Laura; they approved of Laura; she had done her duty by all the family she had, and had nearly died of it. And when Jane suggested that all Prothero wanted was to do the same, they replied that Prothero had no business to think of having a family — they supposed that was what it would end in — a man who could n't keep himself, much less a delicate wife and half-a-dozen children. There would be half-a-dozen; there always were in cases like Prothero's. And at that Jane smiled and said they would be darlings if they were at all like Laura.

They were annoyed with Jane for her championship of Prothero. They were immeasurably annoyed with her when she, and Tanqueray, and Arnott Nicholson, and Nina published his poems — a second volume — by subscription. They subscribed generously, and grew more resentful on the strength of it. Jane pleaded, but Brodrick was inexorable. The more she pleaded the more inexorable he was. This time he put his foot down, and put it (as Jane bitterly remarked) on poor Owen Prothero's neck. It was a neck, a stiff and obstinate neck, that positively invited the foot of a stiff and obstinate man.

Jane hid these things from Laura, who thought, poor innocent, that it was only her luck. Marriage or no marriage, she was incredibly happy. She even persuaded herself it was as well that she could n't be married if that was to make her happier. She distrusted happiness carried to such a preposterous pitch.

She was sitting with Jane one evening, by the October fire-light, in the room where her friend lay quietly.

"Do you remember, Jinny, how we were all in love with George, you and I and Nina and poor old Caro? Caro said it was our apprenticeship to the master."

Jane remembered.

"He was training us; I really think he was," said Laura, still reminiscent. "Can't you hear him saying, 'Come on, come on, what the dickens does it matter if I do see you? It's got to be somebody and it had much better be me. I shan't snigger. But I'm going to make you squirm as much as you *can* squirm. You've got to know what it feels like.' I think

he was positively proud of us when we did come on. I can't imagine him taking any other view. And after all, you know, he did n't snigger."

She pondered. "He's an abominable husband, but he's a glorious friend."

Jane assented. He was glorious and abominable.

Laura's face grew tender in meditation. She was no longer thinking of George Tanqueray.

"There's one awful fear I have with Owen. I shan't be ready in time when he's all nicely disembodied and on his way to heaven. I see him stopped at some uninteresting station, and sitting there waiting — patiently waiting — for me to disembody myself and come on. It'll take me ages."

"It always was difficult to get you off," Jane murmured.

"I know. And I shall feel as if I were keeping him back when he was trying to catch a train."

"I imagine he's pretty sure of his train."

"The truth is Owen does n't really wait. He's always in his train and out of it, so to speak."

"And your disembodimenting yourself, darling, is only a question of time."

"And time," said Laura, "does n't exist for Owen."

But time was beginning to exist for Owen. He felt the pressure of the heavy days that divided him from Laura. He revolted against this tyranny of time.

And Brodrick, the lord of time, remained inexorable for two months.

Long before they were ended, little Laura, with a determination as inexorable as Brodrick's, had left Brodrick's house. To the great disgust and scandal of the Brodricks she had gone back to her rooms in Camden Town, where Prothero was living in the next house with only a wall between them.

Then (it was in the middle of October, when Henry was telling them that Jane must on no account be agitated) Brodrick and Jane nearly quarrelled about Prothero. She said that he was cruel, and that if Owen went into a consumption and Laura died of hunger it would be all his fault. And when he

tried to reason gently with her she went off into a violent fit of hysterics. The next day Brodrick had a son born to him, a whole month before Henry had expected anything of the kind.

At first Brodrick was more than ever enraged with Prothero for tampering with other people's families like that. Jane had to go very near to death before his will was broken. It broke, though, at the touch of her weak arms round his neck, at the sight of her tortured body, and at her voice, sounding from the doors of death and birth, imploring him to do something for Owen Prothero.

Jane had hardly had time to recover before Prothero got work again on Brodrick's paper. Laura said they owed that to Jinny's baby.

They were married in November before Jinny's baby could be christened. It was a rather sad and strange little wedding, in the parish church of Camden Town, with Brodrick to give away the bride, and Caro Bickersteth for bridesmaid, and Tanqueray for best man. Nina was not there. She had sent Laura a cheque for two hundred pounds two months ago — the half of her savings — and told her to go and marry Owen with it at once, and she had torn it up in a fury when Laura sent it back. She could do all that; but she could not go and see Laura and Owen getting married.

The two had found a lodging in an old house in Hampstead, not far from the Consumption Hospital. Laura had objected to the hospital, but Owen refused to recognize it as a thing of fear. He had fallen in love with the house. It topped a rise, at the end of the precipitous lane that curls out of the great modern High Street. It stood back in its garden, its narrow, flat-eyed windows staring over the wall down the lane.

Laura wasn't sure that she quite liked it.

"What are you looking at?" she said, as he paused before this house.

"I'm looking at that," said Prothero.

He pointed to an old, disused iron gate, and to the design, curl within curl of slender, aspiring curves, that grew and branched and overflowed, in tendrils of almost tremulous grace,

and in triple leaves, each less like a leaf than a three-tongued flame. Insubstantial as lace-work against the green background of the garden, it hung rather than stood between its brick pillars, its edges fretted and fringed with rust, consumed in a delicate decay. A stout iron railing guarded this miracle of art and time. Thus cut off from the uses of life, it gave to the place an air of almost unbearable mystery and isolation; it stirred the sense of mortality, of things that having passed through that doorway would not return.

"That house looks and feels as if it had ghosts in it," she said.

"So it has. Not the ghosts of people who have died. The ghosts of people who have never been born. The people," he said, "who come through the iron gate."

And as she looked at it again and at the untrodden grass behind it, she felt that this masterpiece of iron tortured into beauty was an appropriate symbol of their life. Of Owen's, rather than of hers. Closed as it was to all corporeal creatures, there yet went through it presences, intelligences, the august procession of the dreams.

It was flanked by a postern door, a little humble door in the wall of the garden. That was the door, Laura said, through which her little humble dreams would go out into the world to make their living.

"Poor Owen," she said, "it's the door *you* 'll have to go through."

He smiled.

"And the other," he said, "is the door I shall come back through when I'm gone."

That was what she could n't bear to think of, the necessity she laid on him of going, as it were, for ever through the postern door. He was after all such a supernatural, such a disembodied thing. He had at times the eyes of a young divinity innocent of creation, untouched by the shames and terrors of the apparent world. And she knew it was the desire they had for each other that had brought him back from his divine borders and that held him in her world. There were moments when she felt

that he maintained his appearance there by an effort so intense that it must be torture.

And he would have to work for her, doing dreadful things down in Fleet Street. Every day she would see him go down the green walk, and out through the postern gate, into the alien and terrible places of the incarnate. She felt that she had brought mortality upon an immortal thing. She had bound this winged and radiant spirit with the weight of her sad star.

But there came to her a wonderful day when he brought her home, through the little humble door in the wall of the garden; when, shut in their room, he took her to himself. He laid his hands on her shoulders, and she closed her eyes. He bowed his head over her and his breath was on her mouth, and she gave her face to him. His hands trembled holding her, and she felt upon her their power and their passion.

And she knew that it was not her body alone that he sought for and held, but the soul that was her womanhood. It stood before him, a new-born Eve, naked and unafraid on the green plots of Eden. It looked at him, and its eyes were tender with desire and pity. It was tremulous as a body inhabited by leaping light and flame.

She knew that in them both the flame burned singly.

XLI

SHE was aware how wonderful the thing was that had happened to her, how it stood solitary in the world.

It was not so, she knew, with any of the others. It was not so with Nina or with Tanqueray. It was not so even with Jane. Jane had taken into her life an element of tumult and division. The Lord her God (as Tanqueray had once told her) was a consuming fire. Married she served a double and divided flame. For Laura and Prothero the plots of Eden lay green for ever inside the iron gate, and all heaven was held within the four walls of a room.

They had established themselves, strictly speaking, in three rooms, two for work and one for sleep. From the standpoint of tangible requirements, three rooms on a silent upper floor was their idea of a perfect lodging. It was Nina's, it had been Tanqueray's and Jane's. A house, Laura declared, was all very well for a poet like poor Nicky (what would poor Nicky be without his house?); but Jinny's house was a curse to her, and Tanks did not regard his as an unmixed blessing, though she would have died rather than say so to Tank's wife.

Tank's wife had her own theory of Laura's attitude. Laura was making (as she herself had once made) the best of a bad job. Rose had the worst opinion of Mr. Prothero's job; the job that sent him into Fleet Street in all weathers and at all hours of the day and night, and was yet compatible with his hanging about at home, doing nothing, four days out of the seven. Rose was very fond of Laura and of Prothero. She had always felt that they were interesting persons, persons who might any day be ill and require to be taken care of, who required a good deal of being taken care of, as it was. Rose superintended their removal. Rose, very earnestly and gravely, took Laura's housekeeping in hand. To Rose, Laura's house-

keeping was a childish thing. She enlightened its innocence and controlled its ardours and its indiscretions. Spring chicken on a Tuesday and a Wednesday, and all Thursday nothing but such stuff as rice and macaroni was, said Rose, a flyin' outrageous to extremes. She taught them the secret of a breast of veal, stewed in rice (if rice they must have), and many another admirable and economical contrivance.

Rose, fertile in contrivances, came and went a great deal to the house with the iron gate. She, who had once felt that there was nothing in common between her and her husband's friends, was being gradually drawn to them. Jane's baby had been the link with Jane; Mr. Gunning had been the link with Laura; she shared with Laura and Prothero the rare genius of devotion to a person. Rose was shocked and bewildered by many of the little ways of the creators, but she understood *their* way. They loved each other more than they loved anything they created. They loved each other as she loved Tanqueray, but with a perfect comprehension.

Their happiness was ominously perfect. And as time went on Rose shook her wise head over them. They had been married six months, and Rose was beginning to think what a difference it would make if Laura was to have a little baby, and she could come in sometimes and take care of it. But Laura had n't a little baby, and was n't going, she said, to have a little baby. She did n't want one. Laura was elated because she had had a book. She had thought she was never going to have another, and it was the best book she had ever had. Perfection, within her limits, had come to her, now that she had left off thinking about it.

She could n't have believed that so many perfect things could come to her at once. For Laura, in spite of her happiness, remained a sceptic at heart. She went cautiously, dreading the irony of the jealous gods.

Tanqueray had bullied his publishers into giving a decent price for Laura's book. And, to the utter overthrow of Laura's scepticism, the book went well. It had a levity and charm that provoked and captured and never held you for a minute too

long. A demand rose for more of the same kind from the same author, and for her earlier books, the ones that she had got out of bed to write, and that did n't and would n't sell.

For her husband's poems there had been no demand at all. He was not unknown, far from it. He fell conspicuously, illustriously, between the reviewers who reviled him, and the public who would have none of him. If they had only let him alone. But they did n't. There was no poet more pursued and persecuted than Owen Prothero. He trailed bleeding feet, like a scapegoat on all the high mountains. He brought reproach and ridicule on the friends who defended him, on Jane Holland, and on Nina Lempriere and Tanqueray, which was what he minded most of all.

He was beginning to wonder whether, at this rate, there would be any continued demand for his paragraphs, or for any of the work he did for the "Morning Telegraph." His editors were by no means satisfied. If only he could write columns and paragraphs as Laura wrote them. But he could n't really write them properly at all. And the dreadful irony of it was that when he ought to be writing paragraphs, poems would come; and that when he was writing poems he would have to leave off, as often as not, to finish a paragraph.

Laura said to herself that she was going to make an end of all that.

Her gift was so small that it could n't in any way crown him; there was no room on his head for anything besides his own stupendous crown. But, if she could n't put it on his head, her poor gift, she could lay it, she could spread it out at his feet, to make his way softer. He had praised it; he had said that in its minute way it was wonderful and beautiful; and to her the beauty and the wonder of it were that, though it was so small, it could actually make his gift greater. It could actually provide the difficult material conditions, sleep and proper food, an enormous leisure and a perfect peace.

She was a little sore as she thought how she had struggled for years to get things for poor Papa, and how he had had to do without them. And she consoled herself by thinking, after

all, how pleased he would have been if he had known; and how fond he had been of Owen, and how nice Owen had always been to him.

One evening she brought all the publishers' letters and the cheques, and laid them before Owen as he sat in gloom.

"It looks as if we were going to make lots of money."

"We!"

"Yes, we; you and I. Isn't it funny?"

"I don't think it's funny at all," said Owen. "It might be — a little funny, if I made it and not you."

"Darling — that would be funnier than anything."

Her laughter darted at him, sudden and sweet and shrill, and it cut him to the heart. His gravity was now portentous.

"The beauty of it is," she persisted, defying all his gravity, "that, if I can go on, you won't have to make it. And I shall go on, I feel it; I feel myself going. I've got a dream, Owen, such a beautiful dream. Some day, instead of sitting there breaking your heart over those horrid paragraphs, instead of rushing down to Fleet Street in the rain and the sleet and the fog, you shall ramp up and down here, darling, making poems, and it won't matter if you wear the carpet out, if you wear ten carpets. You shall make poems all day long, and you — shall — never — write — another — paragraph again. You do them very badly."

"You need n't remind me of that," said Owen in his gloom.

"But, surely, you don't want to do them *well*?"

"You know what I want."

"You talk as if you had n't got it."

She crouched down beside him and laid her face against his knee.

"I don't think it's nice of you," she said, "not to be pleased when I'm pleased."

His eyes lightened. His hand slid down to her and caressed her hair.

"I *am* pleased," he said. "That's what I wanted, to see you going strong, doing nothing but the work you love. All the same —"

“ Well? ”

“ Can't you understand that I don't want to see my wife working for me? ”

She laughed again. “ You're just like that silly old Tanks. He could n't bear to see his wife working when she wanted to; so he wouldn't let her work, and the poor little soul got ill with not having what she wanted. You didn't want me to get ill, did you? ”

“ I wanted to take care of you — well or ill. I wanted to work for you all my life long. ”

“ And you wanted me to be happy? ”

“ More than anything I wanted you to be happy. ”

“ But you didn't, and you don't want me to be happy — in my own way? ”

He rose and lifted her from the floor where she crouched, and held her so tight to him that he hurt her.

“ My little one, ” he murmured, “ can't you understand it? Can't you see it? You're so small — so small. ”

XLII

FOR six months Jane concentrated all her passion on her little son. The Brodricks, who had never been surprised at anything, owned that this was certainly not what they had expected. Jane seemed created to confound their judgments and overthrow their expectations. Neither Frances Heron nor Sophy Levine was ever possessed by the ecstasy and martyrdom of motherhood. They confessed as much. Frances looked at Sophy and said, "Whoever would have thought that Jinny——?" And Sophy looked at Frances and replied, "My dear, I didn't even think she could have had one. She's a marvel and a mystery."

The baby was a link binding Jane to her husband's family. She was a marvel and a mystery to them more than ever, but she was no longer an alien. The tie of the flesh was strong. She was Hugh's wife, who had gone near to death for him, and had returned in triumph. She was glorified in their eyes by all the powers of life.

The baby himself had an irresistible attraction for them. From John's house in Augustus Road, from Henry's house in Roehampton Lane, from the house of the Levines in St. John's Wood, there was now an incessant converging upon Brodrick's house. The women took an unwearying and unwandering interest in Hugh's amazing son. (It was a girl they had expected.) First thing in the morning, or at noon, or in the early evening at his bed-time, John's wife, Mabel, came with her red-eyed, sad-hearted worship. Winny Heron hung about him and Jane for ever. Jane discovered in Sophy and in Frances an undercurrent of positive affection that set from her child to her.

John Brodrick regarded her with solemn but tender approval, and Henry (who might have owed her a grudge for upsetting

his verdict), Henry loved her even more than he approved. She had performed her part beyond all hope; she linked the generations; she was wedded and made one with the solidarity of the Brodricks.

Jane with a baby was a mystery and a marvel to herself. She spent days in worshipping the small divinity of his person, and in the contemplation of his heartrending human attributes. She doubted if there were any delirium of the senses to compare with the touch of her hands upon his body, or of his fingers on her breast. She fretted herself to fever at his untimely weaning. She ached with longing for the work of his hands upon her, for the wonder of his eyes, opening at her for a moment, bright and small, over the white rim of her breast.

In his presence there perished in her all consciousness of time. Time was nothing to him. He laid his diminutive hands upon the hours and destroyed them for his play.

You would have said that time was no more to Jane than it was to the baby. For six months she watched with indifference the slaughter and ruin of the perfect hours. For six months she remained untormented by the desire to write. Brodrick looked upon her as a woman made perfect, wholly satisfied and appeased.

At the end of six months she was attacked by a mysterious restlessness and fatigue. Brodrick, at Henry's suggestion, took her to the seaside. They were away six weeks.

She came back declaring herself strong.

But there was something about her that Henry did not like. She was if anything more restless; unnaturally (he said) abstracted when you spoke to her; hardly aware of you at times. John had noticed that, too, and had not liked it. They had all noticed it. They were afraid it must be worrying Hugh. She seemed, Sophy said, to be letting things go all round. Frances thought she was not nearly so much taken up with the baby. When she mentioned it to Henry he replied gravely that it was physical. It would pass.

And yet it did not pass.

The crisis came in May of nineteen-six, when the baby was seven months old. It all turned on the baby.

Every morning about nine o'clock, now that summer was come, you found him in the garden, in his perambulator, barefooted and bareheaded, taking the air before the sun had power. Every morning his nurse brought him to his mother to be made much of; at nine when he went out, and at eleven when he came in, full of sleep. In and out he went through the French window of Jane's study, which opened straight on to the garden. He was wheeled processionally up and down, up and down the gravel walk outside it, or had his divine seat under the lime-tree on the lawn. Always he was within sight of Jane's windows.

One Sunday morning (it was early, and he had not been out for five minutes, poor lamb) Jane called to the nurse to take him away out of her sight.

"Take him away," she said. "Take him down to the bottom of the garden, where I can't see him."

Brodrick heard her. He was standing on the gravel path, contemplating his son. It was his great merit that at these moments, and in the presence of other people, he betrayed no fatuous emotion. And now his face, fixed on the adorable infant, was destitute of all expression. At Jane's cry it flushed heavily.

The flush was the only sign he gave that he had heard her. Without a word he turned and followed, thoughtfully, the windings of the exiled perambulator. From her place at the writing-table where she sat tormented, Jane watched them go.

Ten minutes later Brodrick appeared at the window. He was about to enter.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "*Not* you!"

He entered.

"Jinny," he said gently, "what's the matter with you?"

His voice made her weak and tender.

"I want to write a book," she said. "Such a pretty book."

"It's that, is it?"

He sighed and stood contemplating her in ponderous thought.

Jane took up some pens and played with them.

"I can't write if you look at me like that," she said.

"I won't look at you; but I'm going to talk to you."

He sat down. She saw with terror his hostility to the thing she was about to do.

"Talking's no good," she said. "It's got to be done."

"I don't see the necessity."

"It's not one of those things that can be seen."

"No. But look here——" He was very gentle and forbearing. "Need you do it quite so soon?"

"So soon? If I don't do it now, when *shall* I do it?"

He did not answer her. He sat looking at her hands in their nervous, restless play.

Her grave eyes, under their flattening brows, gazed thoughtfully at him. The corners of her mouth lifted a little with their wing-like, quivering motion. Two moods were in her; one had its home in her brooding, tragic eyes, one in her mysterious, mocking lips.

"It's no use, dear," she said. "You'll never turn me into that sort of woman?"

"What sort of woman?"

"The sort of woman you like."

He waited in silence for what she would say next.

"It's not my fault, it's yours and Henry's. You should n't have made me go away and get strong. The thing always comes back to me when I get strong. It's *me*, you see."

"No, Jinny, the whole point is that you're not strong. You're not fit for anything creative."

At that she laughed.

"You're not, really. Why, how old is that child?"

"Six months. No—seven."

"Well, Henry said it would take you a whole year to get over it."

"I thought I should never get over it. We were both wrong."

"My child, it's palpable. You're nervy to the last degree. I never saw you so horribly restless."

"Not more so than when I first knew Baby was coming."

"Well, quite as much."

She gave him a little look that he did not understand.

"Quite as much," she said. "And you were patient with me then."

He maintained a composure that invited her to observe how extremely patient he was now.

"And do you remember — afterwards — before he came — how quiet I was and how contented? I was n't a bit nervy, or restless, or — or troublesome."

He smiled, remembering.

"Can't you see that anything creative — everything creative must be like that?"

He became grave again, having failed to follow her.

"Presently, if this thing goes all right, I shall be quite, quite sane. That's the way it takes you just at first. Then, when you feel it coming to life and shaping itself, you settle down into a peace."

Now he understood.

"Yes," he said, "and you pay for it after."

"My dear, we pay for everything — after."

She leaned back in her chair. The movement withdrew her a little from Brodrick's unremitting gaze.

"There are women — angels naturally — who become devils if they can't have children. I'm an angel — you know I'm an angel — but I shall be a devil if I can't have this. Can't you see that it's just as natural and normal — for me?"

"It's pretty evident," he said, "that you can't have both. You were n't built to stand the double strain ——"

"And you mean — you mean ——"

"I mean that it would be better for you if you could keep off it for a while. At any rate while the child's young."

"But he'll be young, though, for ages. And if — if there are any more of him, there'll be no end to the keeping off."

"You need n't think about that," he said.

"It would be all very well," she said, "if it were simpler; if either you or I could deal with the thing, if we could just wring its neck and destroy it. I would if it would make you

any happier, but I can't. It's stronger than I. I *can't* keep off it."

He pondered. He was trying, painfully, to understand the nature of this woman whom he thought he knew, whom, after all, it seemed, he did not know.

"You used to understand," she said. "Why can't you now?"

Why could n't he? He had reckoned with her genius when he married her. He had honestly believed that he cared for it as he cared for her, that Jinny was not to be thought of apart from her genius. He had found Henry's opinion of it revolting, absurd, intolerable. And imperceptibly his attitude had changed. In spite of himself he was coming round to Henry's view, regarding genius as a malady, a thing abnormal, disastrous, not of nature; or if normal and natural — for Jinny — a thing altogether subordinate to Jinny's functions as a wife and mother. There was no sane man who would not take that view, who would not feel that nature was supreme. And Jinny had proved that left to nature, to her womanhood, she was sound and perfect. Jinny's genius had had, as he put it, pretty well its fling. It was nature's turn.

Under all his arguments there lurked, unrecognized and unsuspected, the natural man's fear of the thing not of nature, of its dominion, coming between him and her, slackening, perhaps sundering the tie of flesh. Through the tie of flesh, insensibly, he had come to look on Jinny as his possession.

"What would you do," he said, "if the little chap were to get ill?"

She turned as if he had struck her.

"Ill? Why could n't you *tell* me he was ill?"

"But he is n't. I was only ——"

"Does Henry say he's ill?"

"Henry? Oh Lord, no."

"You're lying. I'll go to him and see ——"

She made a rush for the window. He sprang after her and caught her. She struggled in his arms.

"Jinny, you little fool. There's nothing — nothing —— He's bursting with health."

"What did you mean, then?"

"I meant — supposing he were ill ——"

"You meant to frighten me?"

She sat down and he saw her fighting for her breath. He knelt beside her and took her in his arms, murmuring inarticulate things in his terror. At his touch she turned to him and kissed him.

"Hugh, dear," she said, "don't frighten me again. It's not necessary."

All that week, and for many weeks, she busied herself with the child and with the house. It was as if she were trying, passionately, to make up for some brief disloyalty, some lapse of tenderness.

Then, all of a sudden she flagged; she was overcome by an intolerable fatigue and depression. Brodrick was worried, but he kept his anxiety to himself. He was afraid now of doing or saying the wrong thing.

One Saturday evening Jinny came to him in his study. She carried the dreadfully familiar pile of bills and tradesmen's books.

"Is it those horrible accounts?" he said.

She was so sick, so white and harassed, so piteously humble, that he knew. She had got them all wrong again.

"I did *try* to keep them," she said.

"Don't try. Leave the damned things alone."

"I *have* left them," she wailed. "And look at them."

He looked. A child, he thought, could have kept them straight. They were absurdly simple. But out of their simplicity, their limpid, facile, elementary innocence, Jinny had wrought fantasies, marvels of confusion, of intricate complexity.

That was bad enough. But it was nothing to the disorder of what Jinny called her own little affairs. There seemed at first to be no relation between Jinny's proved takings and the sums that Jinny was aware of as having passed into her hands. And then Brodrick found the cheques at the back of a drawer, where they had lain for many months; forgotten, Brodrick said, as if they had never been.

"I'm dreadful," said Jinny.

"You are. What on earth did you do before you married me?"

"George Tanqueray helped me."

He frowned.

"Well, you can leave it to me now," he said.

"It takes it out of me more than all the books I ever wrote."

That touched him, and he smiled in spite of himself.

"If," said she, "we only had a housekeeper."

"A housekeeper?"

"It's a housekeeper you want."

She put her face to his, brushing his cheek with a shy and fugitive caress.

"You really ought," she said, "to have married Gertrude."

"You've told me that several times already."

"*She* would n't have plagued you night and day."

He owned it.

"Isn't it rather a pity that she ever left?"

"Why, what else could the poor woman do?"

"Stay, of course."

He had never thought of that solution; he would, if he had been asked, have judged it unthinkable.

"Supposing," said Jinny, "you asked her, very nicely, to come back — don't you think that would save us?"

No; he never would have thought of it himself; but since she had put it that way, as saving them, saving Jinny, that was to say; well, he owned, would n't it?

"I say, but would n't you mind?" he said at last.

"Why should I?" said she.

In the afternoon of the next day, which was a Sunday, Brod-rick appeared at the house in Augustus Road. He asked to see Miss Collett, who was staying there with her cousin.

She came to him, as she used to come to him in his study, with her uplifted, sacrificial face, holding herself stiffly and tensely, half in surrender, half resisting the impulse that drew her.

He laid the situation before her, curtly.

"If you were to come back," he said, "it would solve all our problems."

She reddened, suspecting, as was her way, significance in everything that Brodrick said. Did he, she wondered, recognize that she too had her problem; and was he providing for her too the simple and beautiful solution? It was possible, then, she argued inwardly, that in some way that was not any other man's way, in some immaterial and perfect way, he cared. There was after all a tie. He desired, as she had desired, to preserve it in its purity and its perfection.

Putting all that aside, it remained certain that she was indispensable.

There was a deepening in the grey shallows of her eyes; they darted such light as comes only from the deeps. Her upper lip quivered with a movement that was between a tremor and a smile, subtler than either.

"Are you sure," she said, "that Mrs. Brodrick would n't mind?"

"Jinny? Oh dear me, no. It was her idea."

Her face changed again. The light and flush of life withdrew. Her sallowness returned. She had the fixed look of one who watches the perishing under her eyes of a beloved dream.

"And you," she said, as if she read him, "are not quite sure whether you really want me?"

"Should I ask you if I did n't want you? My only doubt was whether you would care to come. Will you?"

He looked at her with his intent look. It bore some faint resemblance to the look he had for Jane. Her light rose. She met his gaze with a flame of the sacrificial fire.

"I'll do whatever you want," she said.

That was how Gertrude came back to Brodrick's house.

"And now," Jane wrote to Sophy Levine, "we're all happy."

But Sophy in her wisdom wondered. As soon as she heard of Gertrude's installation she rushed over to Putney at the highest speed of her motor-car.

She found Jane on the lawn, lying back in her long chair. An expression of great peace was on her face.

She had been writing. Some sheets of manuscript lay under the chair where she had thrust them out of Sophy's sight. She had heard the imperious trump of the motor-car, sounding her doom as it swung on to the Heath.

Sophy looked at her sister-in-law and said to herself that, really, Henry did exaggerate. She could see nothing in the least abnormal about Jane. Jane, when you took her the right way, was just like anybody else.

Gertrude was out. She had gone over to Roehampton to see Frances. Sophy judged the hour propitious.

"It works," said Jane in answer to her question; "it works beautifully. You don't know, Sophy, what a hand that woman has. Just go indoors and look about you. You can see it working."

"I could n't stand another woman's hand in my house," said Sophy, "however beautifully it worked."

"Is it my house? In a sense it's hers. There's no doubt that she made it about as perfect as a house could be. It was like a beautiful machine that she had invented and kept going. Nobody but Gertrude could have kept it going like that. It was her thing and she loved it."

Sophy's face betrayed her demure understanding of Gertrude's love.

"Gertrude," said Jane, "could n't do my work, and it's been demonstrated that I can't do hers. I don't believe in turning people out of their heaven-appointed places and setting them down to each other's jobs."

"If you could convince me that Gertrude's heaven-appointed place is in your husband's house ——"

"She's proved it."

"He was n't your husband then."

"Don't you see that his being my husband robs the situation of its charm, the vagueness that might have been its danger?"

"Jinny — it never answers — a double arrangement."

"Why not? Why not a quadruple arrangement if necessary?"

"That would be safe. It's the double thing that is n't. You've got to think of Hugh."

"Poor darling, as if I did n't."

"I mean — of him and her."

"Together? Is that your —— Oh, I can't. It's unthinkable."

"You might have thought of her, then."

"I did. I did think of her."

"My dear — you know what's the matter with her?"

"That," said Jane slowly, "is what I thought of. She might have been happy if it had n't been for me."

"That was out of the question," said Sophy, with some asperity.

"Was it? Well, anyhow, she's happy now."

"Jinny, you're beyond anything. Do you mean to tell me that was what you did it for?"

"Partly. I had to have some one. But, yes, that's why I had Gertrude."

"Well, if you did it for Gertrude it was cruel kindness. Encouraging her in her preposterous ——"

"Don't, Sophy. There could n't be anything more innocent on earth."

"Oh, innocent, I dare say. But I've no patience with the folly of it."

"I have. It might so easily have been me."

"You? I don't see you making a fool of yourself."

"I do. I can see myself making an eternal fool. *You* would n't, Sophy, you have n't got it in you. But I could cry when I look at Gertrude. We ought n't to be talking about it. It's awful of us. We've no right even to know."

"My dear, when it's so apparent! What does Hugh think of it?"

"Do you suppose I've given her away to him?"

"I imagine he knows."

"If he does, he would n't give her away to me."

"I'm afraid, dear, she gave herself away."

"Don't you see that that makes it all the worse for her? It makes it horrible. Think how she must have suffered before she *could*. The only chance for her now is to have her back, to face the thing, and let it take its poor innocent place, and make it beautiful for her, so that she can endure it and get all the happiness she can out of it. It's so little she can get, and I owe it to her. I made her suffer."

Sophy became thoughtful.

"After all, Jinny," she said, "you *are* rather a dear. All the same, if Gertrude was n't a good woman ——"

"But she *is* a good woman. That's why she's happy now."

Sophy arranged her motor-veil, very thoughtfully, over and around a smile.

This conversation had thrown light on Jinny, a light that to Sophy's sense was beautiful but perilous, hardly of the earth.

XLIII

DOWN in the garden at Roehampton, Gertrude and Frances Heron were more tenderly and intimately discussing the same theme.

Frances was the only one of the Brodricks with whom tenderness and intimacy were possible for one in Gertrude's case. She was approachable through her sufferings, her profound affections, and the dependence of her position that subdued in her her racial pride.

Gertrude had confessed to a doubt as to whether she ought or ought not to have gone back.

"I don't know," said Frances, "that it was very wise."

"Perhaps not, from the world's point of view. If I had thought of *that* ——" she stopped herself, aware that scandal had not been one of any possibilities contemplated by the Brodricks.

"I was not thinking of it, I assure you," said Frances. "I only wondered whether it were right." She elucidated her point. "For you, for your happiness, considering ——"

"I'm not thinking of my own happiness, or I could n't do it. No, I could n't do it. I was thinking" — her voice sank and vibrated, and rose, exulting, to the stress — "of *his*."

Frances looked at her with gentle, questioning eyes. Hugh's happiness, no doubt, was the thing; but she wondered how Gertrude's presence was to secure it.

Slowly, bit by bit, with many meditative pauses, many sinkings of her thought into the depths, as if she sounded at each point her own sincerity, Gertrude made it out.

"Mrs. Brodrick is very sweet and very charming, and I know they are devoted. Still" — Gertrude's pause was poignant — "still — she *is* unusual."

"Well, yes," said Frances.

"And one sees that the situation is a little difficult."

Frances made no attempt to deny it.

"It always is," said Gertrude, "when the wife has an immense, absorbing interest apart. I can't help feeling that they've come, both of them, to a point—a turning point, where everything depends on saving her, as much as possible, all fret and worry. It's saving him. There are so many things she tries to do and can't do; and she puts them all on him."

"She certainly does," said Frances.

"If I'm there to do them, it will at least prevent this continual friction and strain."

"But you, my dear—you?"

"It does n't matter about me." She was pensive over it.

"If I solve his problem——"

"It will be very hard for you."

"I can bear anything if he's happy."

Frances smiled sadly. She had had worse things than that to bear.

"Of course," she said, "if you know—if you're sure that you care—in that way——"

"I did n't know until the other day, when I came back. It's only when you give up everything that you really know."

Frances was silent. If any woman knew, she knew. She had given up her husband to another woman. For his happiness she had given the woman her own name and her own place, when she might have shamed her by refusing the divorce he asked for.

"It would n't have been right for me to come back," said Gertrude, "if I had n't been certain in my own heart that I can lift this feeling, and make it pure." Her voice thickened slightly. "It is pure. I think it always was. Why should I be ashamed of it? If there's anything spiritual in me, it's *that*."

Frances was not the woman to warn her of possible delusion; to hint at the risk run by the passion that disdains and disowns its kindred to the flesh.

She raised her eyes of tragedy, tender with unfallen tears.

"My dear," she said, "you're a very noble woman."

Across the narrow heath-path, with a lifted head, with flame in her heart and in her eyes, Gertrude made her way to Brodrick's house.

And once again, with immutable punctuality, the silver-chiming clock told out the hours; fair hours made perfect by the spirit of order moving in its round. It moved in the garden, and the lawn was clean and smooth; the roses rioted no longer; the borders and the paths were straight again. Indoors, all things on which Gertrude laid her hand slid sweetly and inaudibly into their place. The little squat god appeared again within his shrine; and a great peace came upon Brodrick and on Brodrick's house.

It came upon Jane. She sank into it and it closed over her, a marvellous, incredible peace. At the turning point when everything depended upon time, when time was all she wanted and was the one thing she could not get, suddenly time was made new and golden for her, it was given to her without measure, without break or stint.

Only once, and for a moment, Gertrude Collett intruded on her peace, looking in at Jane's study window as she passed on soft feet through the garden.

"Are you happy *now*?" she said.

XLIV

SHE moved with such soft feet, on so fine and light a wing that, but for the blessed effects of it, they were hardly aware of her presence in the house. Owing to her consummate genius for self-effacement, Brodrick remained peculiarly unaware. The bond of her secretaryship no longer held them. It had lapsed when Brodrick married, and Gertrude found herself superseded as the editor grew great.

For more than a year Brodrick's magazine had had a staff of its own, and its own office where Miss Addy Ranger sat in Gertrude's seat. Addy no longer railed at the impermanence and mutability of things. Having attained the extreme pitch of speed and competence, she was now established as Brodrick's secretary for good. She owed her position to Jane, a position from which, Addy exultantly declared, not even earthquakes could remove her.

You would have said nothing short of an earthquake could remove the "Monthly Review." It looked as if Brodrick's magazine, for all its dangerous splendour, had come to stay, as if Brodrick, by sheer fixity and the power he had of getting what he wanted, would yet force the world to accept his preposterous dream. He had gone straight on, deaf to his brother-in-law's warning and remonstrance; he had not checked for one moment the flight of his fantasy, nor changed by one nervous movement his high attitude. Month after month, the appearance of the magazine was punctual, inalterable as the courses of the moon.

Bold as Brodrick was, there was no vulgar audacity about his venture. The magazine was not hurled at people's heads; it was not thrust on them. It was barely offered. By the restraint and dignity of his advertisements the editor seemed to be saying

to his public, "There it is. You take it or you leave it. In either case it is there; and it will remain there."

And strangely, inconceivably, it did remain. In nineteen-six Brodrick found himself planted with apparent security on the summit of his ambition. He had a unique position, a reputation for caring, caring with the candid purity of high passion, only for the best. He counted as a power unapproachable, implacable to mediocrity. Authors believed in him, adored, feared, detested him, according to their quality. Other editors admired him cautiously; they praised him to his face; in secret they judged him preposterous, but not absurd. They all prophesied his failure; they gave him a year, or at the most three years.

Some wondered that a man like Brodrick, solid, if you like, but after all, well, of no more than ordinary brilliance, should have gone so far. It was said among them that Jane Holland was the power behind Brodrick and his ordinary brilliance and his most extraordinary magazine. The imagination he displayed, the fine, the infallible discernment, the secret for the perfect thing, were hers, they could not by any possibility be Brodrick's.

Caro Bickersteth, who gathered these impressions in her continuous intercourse with the right people, met them with one invariable argument. If Brodrick was n't fine, if he was n't perceptive, if he had n't got the scent, Caro challenged them, how on earth did he discern Jane Holland? His appreciation of her, Caro informed one or two eminent critics, had considerably forestalled their own. He was the first to see; he always was the first. He had taken up George Tanqueray when other editors would n't look at him, when he was absolutely unknown. And when Caro was reminded that there, at any rate, Jane Holland had been notoriously behind Brodrick's back, and that the editor was, notoriously again, in love with her, Caro made her point triumphantly, maintaining that to be in love with Jane Holland required some subtlety, if it came to that; and pray how, if Brodrick was devoid of it, did Jane Holland come to be in love with *him*?

It was generous of Caro, for even as sub-editor she was no longer Brodrick's right hand. To the right and to the left of him, at his back and perpetually before him, all round about him she saw Jane.

The wonder was that she saw her happy. It was Jane who observed to Caro how admirably they all of them, she, Addy Ranger, Gertrude, Brodrick, and those two queer women, Jane Brodrick and Jane Holland, were settled down into their right places, with everything about them incomparably ordered and adjusted.

Jane marvelled at the concessions that had been made to her, at the extent to which things were being done for her. Her hours were no longer confounded and consumed in supervising servants, interviewing tradespeople, and struggling with the demon of finance. They were all, Jane's hours, serenely and equitably disposed. She gave her mornings to her work, a portion of the afternoon to her son, and her evenings to her husband. Sometimes she sat up quite late with him, working on the magazine. Brodrick and the baby between them divided the three hours which were hers before dinner. The social round had ceased for Jane. Brodrick had freed her from the destroyers, from the pressure of the dreadful, clever little people. She was hardly yet aware of the more formidable impact of his family.

What impressed her was Brodrick's serene acceptance of her friends, his authors. He was wonderful in his brilliant, undimmed enthusiasm, as he followed the reckless charge, the shining onset of the talents. He accepted even Tanqueray's murderous, amazing ironies. If Brodrick's lifted eyebrows confessed that Tanqueray was amazing, they also intimated that Brodrick remained perpetually unamazed.

But, as an editor, he drew the line at Arnott Nicholson.

It was the sensitive Nicky who first perceived and pointed out a change in Jane. She moved among them abstractedly, with mute, half alienated eyes. She seemed to have suffered some spiritual disintegration that was pain. She gave herself to them no longer whole, but piecemeal. At times she seemed to

hold out empty, supplicating hands, palms outward, showing that she could give no more. There was, she seemed to say, no more left of her.

Only Tanqueray knew how much was left; knew of her secret, imperishable resources, things that were hidden profoundly even from herself; so hidden that, even if she gave him nothing, it was always possible to him to help himself. To him she could not change. His creed had always been the unchangeableness, the indestructibility of Jinny.

Still, he assented, smiling, when little Laura confided to him that to see Jane Brodrick in Brodrick's house, among Brodricks, was not seeing Jinny. There was too much Brodrick. It would have been better, said Laura, if she had married Nicky.

He agreed. There would never have been too much of Nicky. But Laura shook her head.

"It is n't a question of proportion," she said. "It is n't that there's too much Brodrick and too little Jinny. It's simply that Jinny is n't there."

Jane knew how she struck them. There was sadness for her, not in their reproaches, for they had none, but in their recognition of the things that were impossible. They had always known how it would be if she married, if she was surrounded by a family circle.

There was no denying that she was surrounded, and that the circle was drawing rather tight. And she was planted there in the middle of it, more than ever under observation. She always had been; she had known it; only in the beginning it had not been quite so bad. Allowances had been made for her in the days when she did her best, when she was seen by all of them valiantly struggling, deplorably handicapped; in the days when, as Brodrick said, she was pathetic.

For the Brodricks as a family were chivalrous. Even Frances and Sophy were chivalrous; and it had touched them, that dismal spectacle of Jane doing her sad best. But now she was in the position of one to whom all things have been conceded. She was in for all the consequences of concession. Everything had been done for her that could be done. She was more than

ever on her honour, more than ever pledged to do her part. If she failed Brodrick now at any point she was without excuse. Every nerve in her vibrated to the touch of honour.

Around her things went with the rhythm of faultless mechanism. There was no murmur, no perceptible vibration at the heart of the machine. You could not put your finger on it and say that it was Gertrude. Yet you knew it. Time itself and the awful punctuality of things were in Gertrude's hand. You would have known it even if, every morning at the same hour, you had not come upon Gertrude standing on a chair winding up the clock that Jane invariably forgot to wind. You felt that by no possibility could Gertrude forget to wind up anything. She herself was wound up every morning. She might have been a clock. She was wound up by Brodrick; otherwise she was self-regulating, provided with a compensation balance, and so long as Brodrick wound her, incapable of going wrong. Jane envied her her secure and secret mechanism, her automatic rhythm, the delicate precision of her ways. Compared with them her own performance was dangerous, fantastic, a dance on a tight-rope. She marvelled at her own preternatural poise.

She was steady; they could never say she was not steady. And they could never say it was not difficult. She had so many balls to keep going. There was her novel; and there was Brodrick, and the baby, and Brodrick's family, and her own friends. She could n't drop one of them.

And at first there came on her an incredible, effortless dexterity. She was a fine juggler on her tight-rope, keeping in play her golden balls that multiplied till you could have sworn that she must miss one. And she never missed. She kept her head; she held it high; she fixed her eyes on the tossing balls, and simply trusted her feet not to swerve by a hair's-breadth. And she never swerved.

But now she was beginning to feel the trembling of the perfect balance. It was as if, in that marvellous adjustment of relations, she had arrived at the pitch where perfection topples over. She moved with tense nerves on the edge of peril.

How tense they were she hardly realized till Tanqueray warned her.

It was on Friday, that one day of the week when Brodrick was kept late at the office of the "Morning Telegraph." And it was August, two months after the coming of Gertrude Collett. Tanqueray, calling to see Jane, as he frequently did on a Friday, about five o'clock in the afternoon, found her in her study, playing with the baby.

She had the effrontery to hold the baby up, with his little naked legs kicking in Tanqueray's face. At ten months old he was a really charming baby, and very like Brodrick.

"Do you like him?" she said.

He stepped back and considered her. She had put her little son down on the floor, where, by an absurd rising and falling motion of his rosy hips, he contrived to travel across the room towards the fireplace.

Tanqueray said that he liked the effect of him.

"The general effect? It is heartrending."

"I mean his effect on you, Jinny. He makes you look like some nice, furry animal in a wood."

At that she snatched the child from his goal, the sharp curb of the hearthstone, and set him on her shoulder. Her face was turned up to him, his hands were in her hair. Mother and child they laughed together.

And Tanqueray looked at her, thinking how never before had he seen her just like that; never before with her body, tall for sheer slenderness, curved backwards, with her face so turned, and her mouth, fawn-like, tilting upwards, the lips half-mocking, half-maternal.

It was Jinny, shaped by the powers of life.

"Now," he said, "he makes you look like a young Mænad; mad, Jinny, drunk with life, and dangerous to life. What are you going to do with him?"

At that moment Gertrude Collett appeared in the doorway.

She returned Tanqueray's greeting as if she hardly saw him. Her face was set towards Jane Brodrick and the child.

"I am going," said Jane, "to give him to any one who wants

him. I am going to give him to Miss Collett. There — you may keep him as long as you like.”

Gertrude advanced, impassive, scarcely smiling. But as she took the child from Jane, Tanqueray saw how the fine lines of her lips tightened, relaxed, and tightened again, as if her tenderness were pain.

She laid the little thing across her shoulder and went from them without a word.

“He goes like a lamb,” said Jane. “A month ago he’d have howled the house down.”

“So that’s how you’ve solved your problem?” said Tanqueray, as he closed the door behind Miss Collett.

“Yes. Isn’t it simple?”

“Very. But you always were.”

From his corner of the fireside lounge, where he seated himself beside her, his eyes regarded her with a grave and dark lucidity. The devil in them was quiet for a time.

“That’s a wonderful woman, George,” said she.

“Not half so wonderful as you,” he murmured. (It was what Brodrick had once said.)

“She’s been here exactly two months and — it’s incredible — but I’ve begun another book. I’m almost half through.”

His eyes lightened.

“So it’s come back, Jinny?”

“You said it would.”

“Yes. But I think I told you the condition. Do you remember?”

She lowered her eyes, remembering.

“What was it you said?”

“That you’d have to pay the price.”

“Not yet. Not yet. And perhaps, after all, I shan’t have to. I may n’t be able to finish.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Because I’ve been so happy over it.”

Of a sudden there died out of her face the fawn-like, woodland look, the maternal wildness, the red-blooded joy. She

was the harassed and unquiet Jinny whom he knew. It was so that her genius dealt with her. She had been swung high on a strong elastic, luminous wave; and now she was swept down into its trough.

He comforted her as he had comforted her before. It was, he assured her, what he was there for.

"We're all like that, Jinny, we're all like that. It's no worse than I feel a dozen times over one infernal book. It's no more than what you've felt about everything you've ever done—even Hambleby."

"Yes." She almost whispered it. "It is worse."

"How?"

"Well, I don't know whether it is that there is n't enough time—yet, or whether I've really not enough strength. Don't tell anybody I said so. Above all, don't tell Henry."

"I should n't dream of telling Henry."

"You see, sometimes I feel as if I was walking on a tight-rope of time, held for me, by somebody else, over an abyss; and that, if somebody else were suddenly to let go, there I should be—precipitated. And sometimes it's as if I were doing it all with one little, little brain-cell that might break any minute; or with one little tight nerve that might snap. It's the way Laura used to feel. I never knew what it was like till now. Poor little Laura, don't you remember how frightened we always were?"

He was frightened now. He suggested that she had better rest. He tried to force from her a promise that she would rest. He pointed out the absolute necessity of rest.

"That's it. I'm afraid to rest. Lest—later on—there should n't be any time at all."

"Why should n't there be?"

"Things," she said wildly and vaguely, "get hold of you. And yet, you'd have thought I'd cut myself loose from most."

"Cut yourself looser."

"But—from what?"

"Your relations."

"How can I. I would n't if I could."

"Your friends, then — Nina, Laura, Prothero, Nicky — me."

"You? I can't do without you."

He smiled. "No, Jinny. I told you long ago you could n't."

He was moved, very strangely moved, by her admission. He had not had to help himself to that. She had given it to him, a gift from the unseen.

"Well," he said presently, "what are you going to do?"

"Oh — struggle along somehow."

"I would n't struggle too hard." He meditated. "Look here, our natural tendency, yours and mine, is to believe that it's people that do all the mischief, and not that the thing itself goes. We'll believe anything rather than that. But we've got to recognize that it's capricious. It comes and goes."

"Still, people do count. My brother-in-law, John Brodrick, makes it go. Whereas you, Tanks, I own you make it come."

"Oh, I make it come, do I?"

He wondered, "What does Brodrick do?"

His smile persisted, so that she divined his wonder.

She turned from him ever so little, and he saw a sadness in her face, thus estranged and averted. He thought he knew the source of it and its secret. It also was a gift from the unseen.

When he had left her she went up-stairs and cast herself upon the bed where her little son lay naked, and abandoned herself to her maternal passion.

And Gertrude stood there in the nursery, and watched her; and like Tanqueray, she thought she knew.

XLV

THERE were moments when she longed to be as Gertrude, a woman with one innocent, uncomplicated aim. She was no longer sorry for her. Gertrude's passion was so sweetly and serenely mortal, and it was so manifestly appeased. She bore within her no tyrannous divinity. She knew nothing of the consuming and avenging will.

Jane was at its mercy; now that she had given it its head. It went, it went, as they said; and the terror was now lest she should go with it, past all bounds.

For the world of vivid and tangible things was receding. The garden, the house, Brodrick and his suits of clothes and the unchanged garment of his flesh and blood, the child's adorable, diminutive body, they had no place beside the perpetual, the ungovernable resurgence of her vision. They became insubstantial, insignificant. The people of the vision were solid, they clothed themselves in flesh; they walked the earth; the light and the darkness and the weather knew them, and the grass was green under their feet. The things they touched were saturated with their presence. There was no sign of ardent life they had not.

And not only was she surrounded by their visible bodies, but their souls possessed her; she became the soul of each one of them in turn. It was the intimacy, the spiritual warmth of the possession that gave her her first sense of separation, of infidelity to Brodrick. The immaterial, consecrated places were invaded. It was as if she closed her heart to her husband and her child.

The mood continued as long as the vision kept its grip. She came out of it unnerved and exhausted, and terrified at herself. Bodily unfaithfulness seemed to her a lesser sin.

Brodrick was aware that she wandered. That was how he had always put it. He had reckoned long ago with her propen-

sity to wander. It was the way of her genius; it was part of her queerness, of the dangerous charm that had attracted him. He understood that sort of thing. It was his own comparative queerness, his perversity, that had made him fly in the face of his family's tradition. No Brodrick had ever married a woman who wandered, who conceivably would want to wander.

And Jinny wandered more than ever; more than he had ever made allowances for. And with each wandering she became increasingly difficult to find.

Still, hitherto he had had his certainty. Her spirit might torment him with its disappearances; through her body, surrendered to his arms, he had had the assurance of ultimate possession. At night her genius had no power over her. Sleeping, she had deliverance in dreams. His passion moved in her darkness, sounded her depths; through all their veils of sleep she was aware of him, and at a touch she turned to him.

Now it was he who had no power over her.

One night, when he came to her, he found a creature that quivered at his touch and shrank from it, fatigued, averted; a creature pitifully supine, with arms too weary to enforce their own repulse. He took her in his arms and she gave a cry, little and low, like a child's whimper. It went to his heart and struck cold there. It was incredible that Jinny should have given such a cry.

He lay awake a long time. He wondered if she had ceased to care for him. He hardly dared own how it terrified him, this slackening of the physical tie.

He got up early and dressed and went out into the garden. At six o'clock he came back into her room. She was asleep, and he sat and watched her. She lay with one arm thrown up above her pillow, as the trouble of her sleep had tossed her. Her head was bowed upon her breast.

His watching face was lowered as he brooded over the marvel and the mystery of her. It was Jinny who lay there, Jinny, his wife, whose face had been so tender to him, whose body utterly tender, utterly compassionate. He tried to realize the

It was Jinny who lay there, Jinny, his wife



marvel and mystery of her genius. He knew it to be an immortal thing, hidden behind the veil of mortal flesh that for the moment was so supremely dear to him. He wondered once whether she still cared for Tanqueray. But the thought passed from him; it could not endure beside the memory of her tenderness.

She woke and found his eyes fixed on her. They drew her from sleep, as they had so often drawn her from some dark corner where she had sat removed. She woke, as if at the urgency of a trouble that kept watch in her under her sleep. In a moment she was wide-eyed, alert; she gazed at him with a lucid comprehension of his state. She held out to him an arm drowsier than her thought.

"I'm a brute to you," she said, "but I can't help it."

She sat up and gathered together the strayed masses of her hair.

"Do you think," she said, "you could get me a cup of tea from the servant's breakfast?"

He brought the tea, and as they drank together their mutual memories revived.

"I have," said she, "the most awful recollection of having been a brute to you."

"Never mind, Jinny," he said, and flushed with the sting of it.

"I don't. That's the dreadful part of it. I can't feel sorry when I want to. I can't feel anything at all."

She closed her eyes helplessly against his.

"It is n't my fault. It is n't really me. It's It."

He smiled at this reference to the dreadful Power.

"The horrible and brutal thing about it is that it stops you feeling. It would, you know."

"Would it? I should n't have thought it would have made *that* difference."

"That's just the difference it does make."

He moved impatiently. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"I would n't talk about it — only — it's much better that you should know what it is, than that you should think it's what it is n't."

She looked at him. His forehead still displayed a lowering incredulity.

"If you don't believe me, ask George Tanqueray."

"George Tanqueray?"

His nerves felt the shock of the thought that had come to him, just now when he watched her sleep. He had not expected to meet Tanqueray again so soon and in the open.

"How much do you think he cares for poor Rose when he's in the state I'm in?"

His face darkened as he considered her question. He knew all about poor Rose's trouble, how her tender flesh and blood had been made to pay for Tanqueray's outrageous genius. He and Henry had discussed it. Henry had his own theory of it. He offered it as one more instance of the physiological disabilities of genius. It was an extreme and curious instance, if you liked, Tanqueray himself being curious and extreme. But it had not occurred to Brodrick that Henry's theory of Tanqueray might be applied to Jane.

"What on earth do you know about George Tanqueray?" he said. "How *could* you know a thing like that?"

"I know because I'm like him."

"No, Jinny, it's not the same thing. You're a woman."

She smiled, remembering sadly how that was what George in a brutal moment had said she was not to be. It showed after all how well he knew her.

"I'm more like George Tanqueray," she said, "than I'm like Gertrude Collett."

He frowned, wondering what Gertrude Collett had to do with it.

"We're all the same," she said. "It takes us that way. You see, it tires us out."

He sighed, but his face lightened.

"If nothing's left of a big strong man like George Tanque-

ray, how much do you suppose is left of me? It's perfectly simple — simpler than you thought. But it has to be."

It was simpler than he had thought. He understood her to say that in its hour, by taking from her all passion, her genius was mindful of its own.

"I see," he said; "it's simply physical exhaustion."

She closed her eyes again.

He saw and rose against it, insanely revolted by the sacrifice of Jinny's womanhood.

"It shows, Jinny, that you *can't* stand the strain. Something will have to be done," he said.

"Oh, what?" Her eyes opened on him in terror.

His expression was utterly blank, utterly helpless. He really had n't an idea.

"I don't know, Jinny."

He suggested that she should stay in bed for breakfast.

She stayed.

Down-stairs, over the breakfast-table, he presented to Gertrude Collett a face heavy with his suffering.

He was soothed by Gertrude's imperishable tact. She was glad to hear that Mrs. Brodrick had stayed in bed for breakfast. It would do her good.

At dinner-time they learned that it had done her good. Gertrude was glad again. She said that Mrs. Brodrick knew she had always wanted her to stay in bed for breakfast. She saw no reason why she should not stay in bed for breakfast every morning.

Henry was consulted. He said, "By all means. Capital idea." In a week's time, staying in bed for breakfast had made such a difference to Jane that Gertrude was held once more to have solved the problem. Brodrick even said that if Jane always did what Gertrude wanted she would n't go far wrong.

The Brodricks all knew that Jane was staying in bed for breakfast. The news went the round of the family in three days. It travelled from Henry to Frances, from Frances to Mabel, from Mabel to John, and from John to Levine and

Sophy. They received it unsurprised, with melancholy comprehension, as if they had always known it. And they said it was very sad for Hugh.

Gertrude said it was very sad for everybody. She said it to Brodrick one Sunday morning, looking at him across the table, where she sat in Jane's place. At first he had not liked to see her there, but he was getting used to it. She soothed him with her stillness, her smile, and the soft deepening of her shallow eyes.

"It's very sad, is n't it," said she, "without Mrs. Brodrick?"

"Very," he said. He wondered ironically, brutally, what Gertrude would say if she really knew how sad it was. There had been another night like that which had seemed to him the beginning of it all.

"May I give you some more tea?"

"No, thank you. I wonder," said he, "how long it's going to last."

"I suppose," said she, "it must run its course."

"You talk like my brother, as if it were an illness."

"Well — is n't it?"

"How should I know? I haven't got it."

He rose and went to the window that looked out on to the garden and the lawn and Jane's seat under the lime-tree. He remembered how one summer, three years ago, before he married her, she had lain there recovering from the malady of her genius. A passion of revolt surged up in him.

"I suppose, anyhow, it's incurable," he said, more to himself than to Gertrude.

She had risen from her place and followed him.

"Whatever it is," she said, "it's the thing we've got most to think of. It's the thing that means most to her."

"To her?" he repeated vaguely.

"To her," she insisted. "I did n't understand it at first; I can't say I understand it now; it's altogether beyond me. But I do say it's the great thing."

"Yes," he assented, "it's the great thing."

"The thing" (she pressed it) "for which sacrifices must be made."

Then, lest he should think that she pressed it too hard, that she rubbed it into him, the fact that stung, the fact that his wife's genius was his dangerous rival, standing between them, separating them, slackening the tie; lest he should know how much she knew; lest he should consider her obtuse, as if she thought that he grudged his sacrifices, she faced him with her supreme sincerity.

"You know that you are glad to make them."

She smiled, clear-eyed, shining with her own inspiration. She was the woman who was there to serve him, who knew his need. She came to him in his hour of danger, in his dark, sensual hour, and held his light for him. She held him to himself high.

He was so helpless that he turned to her as if she indeed knew.

"Do you think," he said, "it does mean most to her?"

"You know best," she said, "what it means."

It sank into him. And, as it sank, he said to himself that of course it was so; that he might have known it. Gertrude left it sinking.

He never for a moment suspected that she had rubbed it in.

XLVI

THEY were saying now that Jane left her husband too much to Gertrude Collett, and that it was hard on Hugh.

They supposed, in their unastonished acceptance of the facts, that things would have to go on like this indefinitely. It was partly Hugh's own fault. That was John Brodrick's view of it. Hugh had given her her head and she was off. And when Jane was off (Sophy declared) nothing could stop her.

And yet she was stopped.

Suddenly, in the full fury of it, she stopped dead.

She had given herself ten months. She had asked for ten months; not a day more. But she had not allowed for friction or disturbance from the outside. And the check — it was a clutch at the heart that brought her brain up staggering — came entirely from the outside, from the uttermost rim of her circle, from Mabel Brodrick.

In January, the last but three of the ten months, Mabel became ill. All autumn John Brodrick's wife had grown slenderer and redder-eyed, her little high-nosed, distinguished face thinned and drooped, till she was more than ever like a delicate bird.

Jane heard from Frances vague rumours of the source of Mabel's malady. The powers of life had been cruel to the lady whom John Brodrick had so indiscreetly married.

It was incredible to all of them that poor Mabel should have the power to stay Jinny in her course. But it was so. Mabel had become attached to Jinny. She clung, she adhered; she drew her life through Jinny. It was because she felt that Jane understood, that she was the only one of them who really knew. It was, she all but intimated, because Jane was not a Brodrick. When she was with the others, Mabel was reminded perpetually of her failure, of how horribly she had made John suffer. Not

that they ever said a word about it, but they made her feel it; whereas Jinny had seen from the first that she suffered too; she recognized her perfect right to suffer. And when it all ended, as it was bound to end, in a bad illness, the only thing that did Mabel any good was seeing Jinny.

That was in January (they put it all down to the cold of January); and every day until the middle of February when Mabel was about again, Jane tramped across the Heath to Augustus Road, always in weather that did its worst for Mabel, always in wind or frost or rain. She never missed a day.

Sometimes Henry was with her. He made John's house the last point of his round that he might sit with Mabel. He had never sat with her before; he had never paid very much attention to her. It was the change in Henry that made Jane alive to the change in Mabel; for the long, lean, unhappy man, this man of obstinate distastes and disapprovals, had an extreme tenderness for all physical suffering.

Since Mabel's illness he had dropped his disapproving attitude to Jane. She could almost have believed that Henry liked her.

One day as they turned together into the deep avenue of Augustus Road, she saw kind grey eyes looking down at her from Henry's height.

"You're very good to poor Mabel, Jinny," he said.

"I can't do much."

"Do what you can. We shan't have her with us very long."

"Henry ——"

"She does n't know it. John does n't know it. But I thought I'd tell you."

"I'm glad you've told me."

"It's a kindness," he went on, "to go and see her. It takes her mind off herself."

"She does n't complain."

"No. She does n't complain. But her mind turns in on itself. It preys on her. And of course it's terrible for John."

She agreed. "Of course, it's terrible — for John." But she was thinking how terrible it was for Mabel. She wondered, did

they say of her and of *her* malady, how terrible it was for Hugh?"

"This is a great interruption to your work," he said presently, with the peculiar solemnity he accorded to the obvious.

Her pace quickened. The frosty air stung her cheeks and the blood mounted there.

"It won't hurt you," he said. "You're better when you're not working."

"Am I?" said she in a voice that irritated Henry.

XLVII

IN February the interruption ceased. Mabel was better. She was well enough for John to take her to the Riviera.

Jane was, as they said, "off" again. But not all at once; not without suffering, for the seventh time, the supreme agony of the creator — that going down into the void darkness, to recall the offended Power, to endure the tortures that propitiate the revolted Will.

Her book was finished in March and appeared in April. Her terror of the published thing was softened to her by the great apathy and fatigue which now came upon her; a fatigue and an apathy in which Henry recognized the beginning of the illness he had prophesied. He reminded her that he had prophesied it long ago; and he watched her, sad and unsurprised, but like the angel he invariably was in the presence of physical suffering.

She was thus spared the ordeal of the birthday celebration. It was understood that she would give audience in her study to her friends, to Arnott Nicholson, to the Protheros and Tanqueray. Instead of all going in at once, they were to take it in turns.

She lay there on her couch, waiting for Tanqueray to come and tell her whether this time it was life or death.

Nicky's turn came first. Nicky was unspeakably moved at the sight of her. He bent over her hand and kissed it; and her fear misread his mood.

"Dear Nicky," she said, "are you consoling me?"

He stood solemnly before her, inspired, positively flaming with annunciation.

"Wait — wait," he said, "till you've seen Him. I won't say a word."

Nicky had never made himself more beautiful; he had never

yet, in all his high renouncing, so sunk, so hidden himself behind the splendour that was Tanqueray.

"And Prothero" (he laid beauty upon beauty), "he'll tell you himself. He's on his knees."

The moments passed. Nicky in his beauty and his pain wandered outside in the garden, leaving her to Prothero and Laura.

And in the drawing-room, where Tanqueray waited for his turn, Jane's family appraised her triumph. Henry, to Caro Bickersteth in a corner, was not sure that he did not, on the whole, regret it. These books wrecked her nerves. She was, Henry admitted, a great genius; but great genius, what was it, after all, but a great Neurosis?

Not far from them Louis Levine, for John's benefit, calculated the possible proceeds of the new book. Louis smiled his mobile smile as he caught the last words of Henry's diagnosis. Henry might say what he liked. Neurosis, to that extent, was a valuable asset. He could do, Louis said, with some of it himself.

Brodrick, as he surveyed with Tanqueray the immensity of his wife's achievement, wondered whether, for all that, she had not paid too high a price. And Sophy Levine, who overheard him, whispered to Frances that it was he, poor dear, who paid.

Tanqueray got up and left the room. He had heard through it all the signal that he waited for, the sound of the opening of Jane's door.

Her eyes searched his at the very doorway. "Is it all right, George?" she whispered. Her hand, her thin hand, held his until he answered.

"It's tremendous."

"Do you remember two years ago — when you would n't drink?"

"I drank this time. I'm drunk, Jinny, drunk as a lord."

"I swore I'd make you drink, this time; if I died for it."

She leaned back in the corner of her couch, looking at him.

"Thank heaven you've never lied to me; because now I know."

"I wonder if you do. It's alive, Jinny; it's organic; it's

been conceived and born." He brought his chair close to the table that stood beside her couch, a barrier between them.

"It's got what we're all praying for — that divine unity —"

"I didn't think it could have it. *I'm torn in pieces.*"

"You? I knew you would be."

"It wasn't the book."

"What was it?" he said fiercely.

"It was chiefly, I think, Mabel Brodrick's illness."

"*Whose* illness?"

"John's wife's. You don't know what it means."

"I can see. You let that woman prey on you. She sucks your life. You're white; you're thin; you're ill, too."

She shook her head. "Only tired, George."

"Why do you do it? Why do you do it, Jinny?" he pleaded.

"Ah — I must."

He rose and walked up and down the room; and each time as he turned to face her he burst out into speech.

"What's Brodrick doing?"

She did not answer. He noticed that she never answered him when he spoke of Brodrick now. He paid no heed to the warning of her face.

"Why does he let his beastly relations worry you? You didn't undertake to marry the whole lot of them."

He turned from her with that, and she looked after him. The set of his shoulders was square with his defiance and his fury.

He faced her again.

"I suppose if *he* was ill you'd have to look after him. I don't see that you're bound to look after his sisters-in-law. Why can't the Brodricks look after her?"

"They do. But it's me she wants."

He softened, looking down at her. But she did not see his look.

"You think," said she, "that it's odd of her — the last thing anybody could want?"

His face changed suddenly as the blood surged in it. He sat down, and stretched his arms across the table that was the bar-

rier between them. His head leaned towards her with its salient thrust, its poise of impetus and forward flight.

"If you knew," he said, "the things you say ——"

His hands made a sudden movement, as if they would have taken hers that lay nerveless and helpless, almost within their grasp.

She drew her hands back.

"It's nearly ten o'clock," she said.

"Do you want me to go?"

She smiled. "No. Only — they'll say, if I sit up, that that's what tires me."

"And does it? Do *I* tire you?"

"You never tire me."

"At any rate, I don't destroy you; I don't prey on you."

"We all prey on each other. I prey on you."

"You? Oh — Jinny!"

Again there was a movement of his hands, checked, this time, by his own will.

"Five minutes past ten, George. They'll come and carry me out if I don't go."

"Who will?"

"All of them, probably. They're all in there."

"It's preposterous. They don't care what they do to you themselves; they bore you brutally; they tire you till you're sick; they hand you on to each other, to be worried and torn to pieces; and they drag you from anybody who does you good. They don't let you have five minutes' pleasure, Jinny, or five minutes' peace. Good Lord, what a family!"

"Anyhow, it's *my* family."

"It isn't. You haven't got a family; you never had and you never will have. They don't belong to you, and you don't belong to any of them, and you know it ——"

She rose. "All the same, I'm going to them," she said. "And that reminds me, how's Rose?"

"Perfectly well, I believe."

"It's ages since I saw Rose. Tell her — tell her that I'm coming to see her."

"When?" he said.

"Some day next week."

"Sunday?"

He knew, and she knew that he knew, that Sunday was Brod-
rick's day.

"No, Monday. Monday, about four."

XLVIII

TANQUERAY was realizing more and more that he was married, and that his marriage had been made in that heaven where the spirit of creative comedy abides. In spite of the superb sincerity of his indifference, he found it increasingly difficult to ignore his wife. It had, in fact, become impossible now that people no longer ignored *him*. Rose, as the wife of an obscurity, could very easily be kept obscure. But, by a peculiar irony, as Tanqueray's genius became recognized, Rose, though not exactly recognized in any social sense, undoubtedly tended to appear. Tanqueray might dine "out" without her (he frequently did), but when it came to asking people back again she was bound to be in evidence. Not that he allowed himself to tread the ruinous round. He still kept people at arm's length. Only people were more agreeably disposed towards George Tanqueray recognized than they had been towards George Tanqueray obscure, and he in consequence was more agreeably disposed towards them. Having made it clearly understood that he would not receive people, that he barred himself against all intrusions and approaches, occasionally, at the length of his arm, he did receive them. And they immediately became aware of Rose.

That did not matter, considering how little *they* mattered. The nuisance of it was that he thus became aware of her himself. Rose at the head of his table, so conspicuously and yet so fortuitously his wife, emphasizing her position by her struggles to sustain it, Rose with her embarrassments and solecisms, with her lost innocence in the matter of her aspirates, agonized now by their terrified flight and by her own fluttering efforts at recapture, Rose was not a person that anybody could ignore, least of all her husband.

As long as she had remained a servant in his house he had

been unaware of her, or aware of her only as a presence beneficent, invisible, inaudible. Here again his celebrity, such as it was, had cursed him. The increase in Tanqueray's income, by enabling them to keep a servant, had the effect of throwing Rose adrift about the house. As the mistress of it, with a maid under her, she was not quite so invisible, nor yet so inaudible as she had been.

It seemed to Tanqueray that his acuter consciousness dated from the arrival of that maid. Rose, too, had developed nerves. The maid irritated Rose. She put her back up and rubbed her the wrong way in all the places where she was sorest. For Rose's weakness was that she could n't tolerate any competition in her own line. She could n't, as she said, abide sitting still and seeing the work taken out of her hands, seeing another woman clean *her* house, and cook *her* husband's dinner, and she knowing that she could do both ten times as well herself. She appealed to Tanqueray to know how he'd like it if she was to get a man in to write his books for him. She was always appealing to Tanqueray. When George wanted to know what, after all, was wrong with Susan, and declared that Susan seemed to him a most superior young woman, Rose said that was the worst of it. Susan was much too superior for her. She could see well enough, she said, that Susan knew that she was not a lady, and she could see that George knew that she knew. Else why did he say that Susan was superior? And sometimes George would be beside himself with fury and would roar, "Damn Susan!" And sometimes, but not often, he would be a torment and a tease. He would tell Rose that he loved Susan, that he adored Susan, that he could n't live without her. He might part with Rose, but he could n't possibly part with Susan. Susan was the symbol of his prosperity. Without Susan he would not feel celebrated any more.

And sometimes Rose would laugh; and sometimes, in moments of extreme depression, she would deplore the irony of the success that had saddled her with Susan. And Tanqueray cursed Susan in his heart, as the cause of Rose's increasing tendency to conversation.

It was there that she encroached. She invaded more and more the guarded territory of silence. She annexed outlying pieces of Tanqueray's sacred time, pursuing him with talk that it was intolerable to listen to.

He blamed Prothero and Laura and Jane for that, as well as Susan. They were the first who had encouraged her to talk, and now she had got the habit.

And it was there again that the really fine and poignant irony came in. Through her intercourse with Jane and Laura, Rose offered herself for comparison, and showed flagrantly imperfect. But for that, owing to Tanqueray's superhuman powers of abstraction, she might almost have passed unnoticed. As it was, he owned that her incorruptible simplicity preserved her, even at her worst, from being really dreadful.

Once, after some speech of hers, there had followed an outburst of fury on Tanqueray's part and on Rose's a long period of dumbness.

He was, he always had been, most aware of her after seeing Jane Brodrick. From every meeting with Jane he came to her gloomy and depressed and irritable. And the meetings were growing more frequent. He saw Jane now at less and less intervals. He couldn't go on without seeing her. A fortnight was about as long as he could stand it. He had a sense of just struggling through, somehow, in the days that passed between the night (it was a Thursday) when he had dined at Putney and Monday afternoon when Jane had promised that she would come to Hampstead.

On Monday a telegram arrived for Tanqueray. The brisk director of a great publishing firm in New York desired (at the last moment before his departure) an appointment with the novelist for that afternoon. The affair was of extreme importance. The American meant business. It would be madness not to see him, even though he should miss Jinny.

All morning Tanqueray sulked because of that American.

Rose was cowed by his mood. At luncheon she prepared herself to sit dumb lest she should irritate him. She had soft movements that would have conciliated a worse ruffian than

Tanqueray in his mood. She rebuked the importunities of Joey in asides so tender that they could n't have irritated anybody. But Tanqueray remained irritated. He could n't eat his luncheon, and said so.

And then Rose said something, out loud. That was n't her fault, she said. And Tanqueray told her that he had n't said it was. Then, maddened by her thought, she (as she put it to herself afterwards) fair burst with it.

"I wish I'd never set eyes on that Susan!" said she.

Tanqueray at the moment was trying to make notes in his memorandum-book. He might be able to cut short that interview if he started with all his points clear.

"Oh — *hold* your tongue," said Tanqueray.

"I *am* 'oldin' it," said Rose.

He smiled at that in spite of himself. He was softened by its reminder of her submissive dumbness, by its implication that there were, after all, so many things she might have said and had n't.

Having impressed upon her that she was on no account to let Mrs. Brodrick go till he came back, he rushed for his appointment.

By rushing away from it, cutting it very short indeed, he contrived to be back again at half-past four. Susan informed him that Mrs. Brodrick had come. She had arrived at four with the baby and the nurse. She was in there with the baby.

"The baby?"

Sounds of laughter came from the dining-room, rendering it unnecessary for Susan to repeat her statement. She smiled sidelong at the door, as much as to say she had put her master on to a good thing. He would appreciate what he found in there.

In there he found Jinny crouching on a footstool; facing her, Rose knelt upon the floor. In the space between them, running incessantly to and fro on his unsteady feet, was Brodrick's little son. When he got to Jinny he flung his arms around her neck and kissed her twice, and then Rose said, "Oh, kiss poor Rose"; and when he got to Rose he flung his arms around her neck, too,

and kissed her, once only. That was the distinction that he made. And as he ran he laughed, he laughed as if love were the biggest joke in all the world.

Tanqueray stood still in the doorway and watched, as he had stood once in the doorway of the house in Bloomsbury, watching Rose. Now he was watching Jinny. He thought he had never seen her look so divinely happy. He watched Brodrick's son and thought distastefully that when Brodrick was a baby he must have looked just like that.

And the little Brodrick ran to and fro, from Jinny to Rose and from Rose to Jinny, passionately, monotonously busy, with always the same rapturous embrace from Brodrick's wife and always the same cry from Tanqueray's, "Kiss poor Rose!"

When Jane turned to greet Tanqueray, the baby clung to her gown. His mouth drooped as he realized that it was no longer possible to reach her face. Identifying Tanqueray as the cause of her remoteness, he stamped a baby foot at him; he distorted his features and set up a riotous howl. Rose reiterated her sad cry as a charm to distract him. She pretended to cry too, because the baby would n't look at her. He would n't look at anybody till his mother took him in her arms and kissed him. Then, with his round face still flushing under his tears, he smiled at Tanqueray, a smile of superhuman forgiveness and reconciliation.

Rose gazed at them in a rapture.

"Well," said she, "how you can keep orf kissin' 'im ——"

"I can keep off kissing anything," said he.

Jane asked if he would ring for the nurse to take the baby.

Tanqueray was glad when he went. It had just dawned on him that he did n't like to see Jinny with a baby; he did n't like to see her preoccupied with Brodrick's son, adoring, positively adoring, and caressing Brodrick's son.

At the same time it struck him that it was a pity that Rose had never had a baby; but he did n't carry the thought far enough to reflect that Rose's baby would be his son. He wondered if he could persuade Jinny to send the baby home and stay for dinner.

He apologized for not having been there to receive her. Jane replied that Rose had entertained her.

"You mean that you were entertaining Rose?"

"We were entertaining each other."

"And now you've got to entertain me."

She was going to when Rose interrupted (her mind was still running on the baby).

"If I was you," said she, "I should n't leave 'im much to that Gertrude."

"What?" (It was Tanqueray who exclaimed.) "Not to the angel in the house?"

"I don't know about angels, but if it was me I would n't leave 'im, or she'll get a hold on 'im."

"Is n't he," said Tanqueray, "a little young?"

But Rose was very serious.

"It's when 'e's young she'll do the mischief."

"My dear Rose," said Jane, "whatever do you think she'll do?"

"She'll estrange 'im, if you don't take care."

"She could n't."

"Could n't? She'll get a 'old before you know where you are."

"But," said Jane quietly, "I do know where I am."

"Not," Rose insisted, "when you're away, writin'."

Tanqueray saw Jane's face flush and whiten. He looked at Rose.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said, with anger under his breath.

Jane seemed not to know that he was there. She addressed herself exclusively to Rose.

"What do you suppose happens when I'm — away?"

"You forget."

"Never!" said Jane. The passion of her inflection was lost on Rose who brooded.

"You forget," she repeated. "And she does n't."

Involuntarily Tanqueray looked at Jane and Jane at Tanqueray. There were moments when his wife's penetration was terrible.

Rose was brooding so profoundly that she failed to see the passing of that look.

"If it was me," she murmured in a thick voice, a voice soft as her dream, "if it was my child ——"

Tanqueray's nerves gave way. "But it is n't. He positively roared at her. "And it never will be."

Rose shrank back as if he had struck her. Jane's heart leaped to her help.

"If it was," she said, "it would have the dearest, sweetest little mother."

At that, at the sudden tenderness of it coming after Tanqueray's blow, Rose gave a half-audible moan and got up quickly and left the room. They heard her faltering steps up-stairs in the room above them.

It was then that Tanqueray asked Jane if she would stay and dine with them. She could send a note to Brodrick by the nurse.

She stayed. She felt that if she did not Tanqueray would bully Rose.

Rose was glad she stayed. She was afraid to be left alone that evening with George. She was dumb before him, and her dumbness cut Jane to the heart. Jane tried to make her talk a little during dinner. They talked about the Protheros when Susan was in the room, and when she was out of it they talked about Susan.

This was not wise of Jane, for it exasperated Tanqueray. He wanted to talk to Jane, and he wanted to be alone with her to talk.

After dinner they went up to his study to look at some books he had bought. The best of selling your own books, he said, was that you could buy as many as you wanted of other people's. He had now got as many as he wanted. They were more than the room would hold. All that he could not get on to the shelves were stacked about the floor. He stood among them smiling.

Rose did not smile. The care of Tanqueray's study was her religion.

"How am I to get round them 'eaps to 'dust?" said she.

"You don't get round them, and you don't dust," said Tanqueray imperturbably.

"Then — them books 'll breed a fever."

"They will. But *you* won't catch it."

Rose lingered, and he suggested that it would be as well if she went down-stairs and made the coffee. She need n't send it up till nine, he said. It was now five minutes past eight.

She went obediently.

"She knows she isn't allowed into this room," said Tanqueray to Jane.

"You speak of her as if she was a dog," said she. She added that she would have to go at half-past eight. There was a train at nine that she positively must catch.

He had to go down and ask Rose to come back with the coffee soon. Jane was glad that she had forced on him that act of humility.

For the moments that she remained alone with him she wandered among his books. There were some that she would like to borrow. She talked about them deliberately while Tanqueray maddened.

He walked with her to the station.

She turned on him as they dipped down the lane out of sight and hearing.

"George," she said, "I'll never come and see you again if you bully that dear little wife of yours."

"I? — Bully her?"

"Yes. You bully her, you torture her, you terrify her till she does n't know what she's doing."

"I'm sorry, Jinny."

"Sorry? Of course you're sorry. She slaves for you from morning till night."

"That's not my fault. I stopped her slaving and she got ill. Why, it was you — *you* — who made me turn her on to it again."

"Of course I did. She loves slaving for you. She'd cut herself in little pieces. She'd cook herself — deliciously — and

serve herself up for your dinner if she thought you'd fancy her."

"You're right, Jinny. I never ought to have married her."

"I did n't say you never ought to have married her. I say you ought to be on your knees now you have married her. She's ten thousand times too good for you."

"You're right, Jinny. You always were right, you always will be damnably right."

"And you always will be — oh dear me — so rude."

He looked in her face like a whipped dog trying to reinstate himself in favour, as far as Tanqueray could look like a whipped dog.

"Let me carry those books for you," he said.

"You may carry the books, but I don't like you, Tanks."

His devil, the old devil that used to be in him, looked at her then.

"You used to like me," he said.

But Jinny was beyond its torment. "Of course I liked you. I liked you awfully. You were another person then."

He said nothing to that.

"Forgive me, George," she said presently. "You see, I love your little wife."

"I love you for loving her," he said.

"You may go on loving me for that. But you need n't come any further with me. I know my way."

"But I want to come with you."

"And I, unfortunately, want to be alone."

"You shall. I'll walk behind you — as many yards as you like behind you. I've got to carry the books."

"Bother the books. I'll carry them."

"You'll do nothing of the sort."

They walked together in silence till the station doors were in sight. He meant to go with her all the way to Putney, carrying the books.

"I wish," he said, "I knew what would really please you."

"You do know," she said.

A moment passed. Tanqueray stopped his stride.

"I'll go back and beg her pardon — *now*."

She gave him her hand. He went back; and between them they forgot the books.

Though it was not yet ten the light was low in Rose's bedroom. Rose had gone to bed. He went up to her room. He raised the light a little, quietly, and stood by her bedside. She lay there, all huddled, her body rounded, her knees drawn up as if she had curled into herself in her misery. One arm was flung out on the bed-clothes, the hand hung cramped over a fold of blanket; sleep only had slackened its convulsive grip. Her lips were parted, her soft face was relaxed, blurred, stained in scarlet patches. She had cried herself to sleep.

And as he looked at her he remembered how happy she had been playing with Jinny's baby; and how his brutal words had struck her in the hurt place where she was always tender.

His heart smote him. He undressed quietly and lay down beside her.

She stirred; and, finding him there, gave a little cry and put her arms about him.

And then he asked her to forgive him, and she said there was nothing to forgive.

She added with her seeming irrelevance, "You did n't go all the way to Putney then?"

She knew he had meant to go. She knew, too, that he had been sent back.

XLIX

ON her return Jane went at once to Brodrick in his study. The editor was gloomy and perturbed. He made no response to her regrets, nor yet to her excuse that Tanqueray had kept her. Presently, after some moments of heavy silence, she learned that her absence was not the cause of his gloom. He was worried about the magazine. Levine was pestering him. When she reminded him that Louis had nothing to do with it, that she thought he was going to be kept out, he replied that that was all very well in theory; you could n't keep him out when he'd got those infernal Jews behind him, and they were running the concern. You could buy him out, you could buy out the whole lot of them if you had the money; but, if you had n't, where were you? It had been stipulated that the editor was to have a free hand; and up till now, as long as the thing had paid its way, his hand had been pretty free. But it wasn't paying; and Levine was insisting that the free hand was the cause of the deficit.

He did not tell her that Levine's point was that they had not bargained for his wife's hand, which was considerably freer than his own. If they were prepared to run the magazine at a financial loss they were not prepared to run it for the exclusive benefit of his wife's friends; which, Levine said, was about what it amounted to.

That was what was bothering Brodrick; for it was Jane's hand, in its freedom, that had kept the standard of the magazine so high. It had helped him to realize his expensive dream. The trouble, this time, he told her, was a tale of Nina Leprieure's.

Jane gave an excited cry at this unexpected flashing forth of her friend's name.

"What, Nina? Has she ——?"

Brodrick answered, almost with anger, that she had. And Levine had put his silly foot down. He had complained that the tale was gruesome (they had set it up; it was quite a short thing); Nina's tales usually were gruesome; and Nina's price was stiff. He didn't know about the price; perhaps it was a trifle stiff; you might even say it crackled; but the tale — ! Brodrick went on in the soft, even voice that was a sign with him of profound excitement — the tale was a corker. He didn't care if it *was* gruesome. It was magnificent.

"More so than her last?" Jane murmured.

"Oh, miles more." He rummaged among his papers for the proofs. He'd be eternally disgraced, he said, if he didn't publish it. He wished she'd look at the thing and tell him if he would n't be.

She looked and admired his judgment. The tale was everything that he had said. Nina had more than found herself.

"Of course," she said, "you'll publish it."

"Of course I shall. I'm not going to knuckle under to Louis and his beastly Jews — with a chance like that. I don't care if the price is stiff. It's a little masterpiece, the sort of thing you don't get once in a hundred years. It'll send up the standard. That's of course why he funks it."

He pondered. "There's something queer about it. Whenever that woman gets away and hides herself in some savage lair she invariably does a thing like this."

Jane admitted half-audibly that it was queer.

They gave themselves up to the proofs, and it was late when she heard that Nina had crept from her savage lair and was now in London. It was very queer, she thought, that Nina had not told her she was coming.

She called the next day at Adelphi Terrace. She found Nina in her front room, at work on the proofs that Brodrick had sent her.

Nina met her friend's reproaches with a perfect frankness. She had not told her she was coming, because she didn't know how long she was going to stay, and she had wanted, in any case, to be let alone. That was yesterday. To-day what she

wanted more than anything was to see Jane. She had n't read her book, and was n't going to until she had fairly done with her own. She had heard of it from Tanqueray, and was afraid of it. Jane, she declared, was too tremendous, too overwhelming. She could only save herself by keeping clear of her.

"I should have thought," Jane said, "you were safe enough — after that last." She had told her what she had thought of it in the first moments of her arrival. "Safe, at any rate, from me."

"You're the last person I shall ever be safe from. There you are, always just ahead of me. I'm exhausted if I look at you. You make me feel as if I never could keep up."

"But why? There's no comparison between your pace and mine."

"It's not your pace, Jinny, it's your handicap that frightens me."

"My handicap?"

"Well — a baby, a husband, and all those Brodricks and Levines. I've got to see you carrying all that weight, and winning; and it takes the heart out of me."

"If I did win, would n't it prove that the handicap was n't what you thought it?"

Nina said nothing. She was thinking that it must be pretty serious if Jinny was not prepared to be sincere about it.

"That's what I want to prove," said Jane softly, "that there is n't any handicap. That's why I want to win."

Her feeling was that she must keep her family out of these discussions. She had gone too far the other night in the things that she had said to Tanqueray, that Tanqueray had forced her to say. She had made herself afraid of him. Her admissions had been so many base disloyalties to Hugh. She was not going to admit anything to Nina, least of all that she found her enviable, as she stood there, stripped for the race, carrying nothing but her genius. It was so horribly true (as Nina had once said) that the lash had been laid across her naked shoulders to turn her into the course when she had swerved from it. It had

happened every time, every time; so invariably as to prove that for Nina virginity was the sacred, the infrangible, predestined law, the one condition.

But the conditions, she said aloud, were nobody's business but your own. She refused to be judged by anything but the result. It was absurd to talk about winning and handicapping; as if creative art *was* a handicap, as if there were any joy or any end in it beyond the act of creation. You defeated your end if you insisted on conditions, if you allowed anything extraneous to count as much as that.

The flush on her face showed what currents moved her to her protest.

"Does it seem to you, then, that *I*'ve defeated my end?" Nina pressed her point home implacably.

Jane strung herself to the pain of it.

"Not you." She paused for her stroke. "Nor yet I."

She rose with it. She wanted to get away from Nina who seemed terrible to her at that moment. She shrank from meeting Nina's eyes.

Nina was left meditating on her friend's beautiful hypocrisy.

It might be beautiful, but it was fatuous, too, of Jinny to pretend that she could live surrounded and hemmed in by Brodricks and do what she had done without turning a hair, or that she could maintain so uncompromising an affection for her husband and child without encountering the vengeance of the jealous god. Nina could not suppose that Jinny's god was less jealous than George Tanqueray's or her own. And Jinny must be perpetually offending him. She recognized the righteousness of the artist in Jinny's plea to be judged only by the results. That, no doubt, was how posterity would judge her. But she, Nina, was judging, like posterity, by the results. The largeness and the perfection of them pointed to a struggle in which poor Jinny must have been torn in pieces. Her very anxiety to conceal the signs of laceration betrayed the extent to which she had been torn. She had not gone so far in her hypocrisy as to argue that the struggle was the cause of the perfection, and you could

only conclude that, if the conditions had been perfect, there would have been no end to the vast performances of Jinny. That was how she measured her.

It looked as if whatever you did to her you could n't stop Jinny, any more than you could stop George Tanqueray. Jinny, if you came to think of it, had the superior impetus. George, after all, had carefully removed obstruction from his path. Jinny had taken the risk, and had swept on, reckless, regardless.

It was beautiful, her pretending not to see it; beautiful, too, her not letting you allow for it in appraising her achievement, lest it should seem somehow, to diminish yours. As if she had not said herself that the idea of rivalry was absurd.

Nina knew it. Her fear lay deeper than the idea of rivalry. She had no vision of failure in her career as long as she kept to it. The great thing was to be certain of the designs of destiny; so certain that you acquiesced. And she was certain now; she was even thankful for the hand and its scourge on her shoulders, turning her back again on to the splendid course. It marked her honourably; it was the sign and certificate of her fitness. She was aware also that, beyond the splendid course, there was no path for her. She would have been sure of herself there but that her nerves remembered how she had once swerved. She had instincts born of that experience; they kept her on the lookout for danger, for the sudden starting up of the thing that had made her swerve. What she dreaded now was some irreparable damage to her genius.

She was narrowed down to that, her bare genius. Since there was nothing else; since, as she had said long ago, she had been made to pay for it with all she had and all she might have had, she cherished it fiercely now. Her state was one of jealousy and fear, a perpetual premonition of disaster. She had tried to forget the existence of Jane's book, because Tanqueray had said it was tremendous, and she felt that, if it were as tremendous as all that, it was bound to obscure for a moment her vision of her own.

If the designs of destiny were clear, it was equally evident that her friends were bent on frustrating them. Within five

minutes after Jane Brodrick had removed her disturbing presence, Nina received a telegram from Owen Prothero. He was coming to see her at five o'clock. It was now half-past four.

This was what she had dreaded more than anything. Her fear of it had kept her out of London for two years.

Owen had been considerate in notifying her of his coming. It suggested that it was open to her to escape if she did not want to see him, while it warned her not to miss him if she did. She debated the point for the half hour he had left her, and decided that she would see him.

Prothero arrived punctually to his hour. She found no change in his aspect or his manner. If he looked happy, he looked it in his own supersensual way. Marriage had not abridged his immeasurable remoteness, nor touched his incorruptible refinement.

He considered her with a medical eye, glad to see her bearing the signs of life lived freely and robustly in the open air. Her mountains, he said, evidently agreed with her.

She inquired after Laura, and was told that she would not know her. The Kiddy, he said, smiling, had grown up. She was almost plump; she had almost a colour.

"She wants to see you," he said. "She told me I was to bring you back with me."

Agnes passed before she answered. "I don't think, really, Owen, that I can come."

"Why not?" he said.

She would have told him that she was too busy, but for her knowledge that with Owen lying was no good. She resented his asking her why not, when he knew perfectly well why.

"Why ever not," he repeated, "when we want you?"

She smiled. "You seem determined to get everything you want."

She had a good mind to tell him straight out, there and then, that he could n't have everything he wanted, not with her, at any rate. He could n't have it both ways. But you do not say these things; and if she could judge by the expression of his face, what she had said had hit him hard enough.

He sheltered himself behind a semblance of irrelevance. "Laura is very fond of you."

The significance of the statement lay in its implication that he was very fond of Laura. Taken that way it was fuel heaped on to Nina's malignant fire. Under it she smouldered darkly.

"She's getting unhappy about you," he went on. "You don't want to make her unhappy, do you?"

"Did I ever want to make her unhappy?" she answered, with a flash. "And if it comes to that, why should it?"

"The Kiddy has a very tender conscience."

She saw what he meant now. He was imploring her not to put it into Laura's head that she had come between them. That would hurt Laura. His wife was never to suspect that her friend had suffered. Nina, he seemed secretly to intimate, was behaving in a manner likely to give rise to that suspicion. He must have been aware that she did it to save herself more suffering; but his point was that it didn't matter how much she suffered, provided they saved Laura. There must be no flaw in that perfect happiness.

"You mean," she said, "she won't understand it if I don't come?"

"I'm afraid I mean she will understand it if you keep on not coming. But of course you'll come. You're coming with me now."

It was the same voice that had told her three years ago that she was not coming with him, that she was going to stay and take care of Laura, because that was all that she could do for him. And as she had stayed then she went with him now, and for the same reason.

She felt, miserably, that her reluctance damned her; it proved her coarse, or at any rate not fine enough for the communion he had offered her, the fineness of which she had once accepted as the sanction of their fellowship. She must seem to him preposterous in her anxiety to break with him, to make an end of what had never been. All the same, what he was forcing on her now was the fact of separation. As they approached the house

where he and Laura lived she had an increasing sense of estrangement from him and of distance.

He drew her attention to the iron gate that guarded their sanctuary, and the untrodden grass behind it. His dreams came in by that gate, and all other things by the postern door, which, he said, was the way he and she must go.

Nina paused by the gate. "It won't open, Owen."

"No. The best dreams come through the gates that never open."

"It looks as if a good south wind would bring it down."

"It will last my time," he said.

L

L AURA received her as if Prothero were not there; as if he never had been, never would be there. She looked up from their embrace with a blue-eyed innocence that ignored him in its perfect assurance that they had kept their pledge, that nothing had ever come or would come between them.

It struck Nina that he had no grounds for his anxiety. Laura was not suffering; she was not going to suffer. She had no consciousness or conscience in the matter.

It was made clear to Nina that she was too happy for that, too much in love with Owen, too much aware that Owen was in love with her, though their fineness saved them both from any flagrant evidences of their state. They evaded as by a common understanding the smallest allusion to themselves and their affairs. They suggested charmingly that what excited them was the amazing performance of their friends, of Tanqueray, of Jane, of Nina. In her smiling protest that she no longer counted Laura gave the effect of serene detachment from the contest. She surveyed it from an inaccessible height, turning very sweetly and benignly from her bliss. She was not so remote, she seemed to say, but that she remembered. She knew how absorbing those ardent rivalries could be. Nina she evidently regarded as absorbed fatally, beyond recall; and no wonder, when for her the game was so magnificent. If Nina cared for the applause of a blessed spirit, it was hers.

It seemed to Nina's morbid sense that Laura overdid it; that the two of them closed round her by a common impulse and a common fear, that they rushed to her wild head to turn her to her course and keep her there. In every word there was a sting for her, the flick of the lash that drove her on.

Nina was then aware that she hated Laura. The hatred was not active in her presence; it made no movement towards its

object; it lay somewhere in the dark; it tossed on a hot bed, sleepless in an incurable distress.

And Laura remained unconscious. She took her presently up-stairs to her room, Owen's room. It was all they had, she said. Nina held her head very straight, trying hard not to see Owen's coat that hung behind the door, or his big boots all in a row beside Laura's little ones. Her face in the glass met her with a challenge to her ironic humour. It demanded why she could not face that innocent juxtaposition, after all she *had* stood, after all that they were evidently prepared to make her stand. But she was not to be moved by any suggestions of her face. She owed it a grudge; it showed so visibly her murkiness. Sunburnt, coarsened a little by the wind, with the short, virile, jutting bridge of the nose, the hot eyes, the mouth's ironic twist, it was the face not of a woman but a man, or rather of a temperament, a face foredoomed to disaster. She accentuated its effect by the masculine fashion of her clothes and the way she swept back her hair sidelong from her forehead. Laura saw her doing it now.

"I like your face," was her comment.

"It's more than I do," said Nina. "But I like my hands."

She began washing them with energy, as if thus dismissing an unpleasant subject. She could admire their fine flexible play under the water; do what she would with them her hands at least were feminine. But they brought her up sharp with the sight of the little scar, white on her wrist, reminding her of Owen. She was aware of the beast in her blood that crouched, ready to fall upon the innocent Laura.

At the other end of the room, by the wardrobe, Laura, in her innocence, was babbling about Owen.

"He's growing frightfully extravagant," she said. "He got fifteen pounds for an article the other day, and what do you think he did with it? Look there!"

She had taken a gown, a little mouse-coloured velvet gown, from the wardrobe and laid it on the bed for Nina to admire.

"He went and spent it, every bit of it, on that. He said he thought I should look nice in it. Wasn't it clever of him to

know? And who ever would have thought that he'd have cared?"

Nina looked at the gown and remembered the years when Laura had gone shabby.

"He cares so much," said Laura, "that I have to put it on every evening."

"Put it on now," said Nina.

"Shall I?" She was longing to. "No, I don't think I will."

"You must," said Nina.

Laura put it on, baring her white neck and shoulders, and turned for Nina to "fasten her up the back."

Nina had a vision of Prothero standing over the little thing, his long deft hands trembling as he performed this office.

The Kiddy, divinely unconscious, babbled on of Owen and the wonderful gown.

"Conceive," she said, "the darling going out all by himself to get it! How he knew one gown from another—how he knew the shops—what hand guided him—I can't think. It must have been his guardian angel."

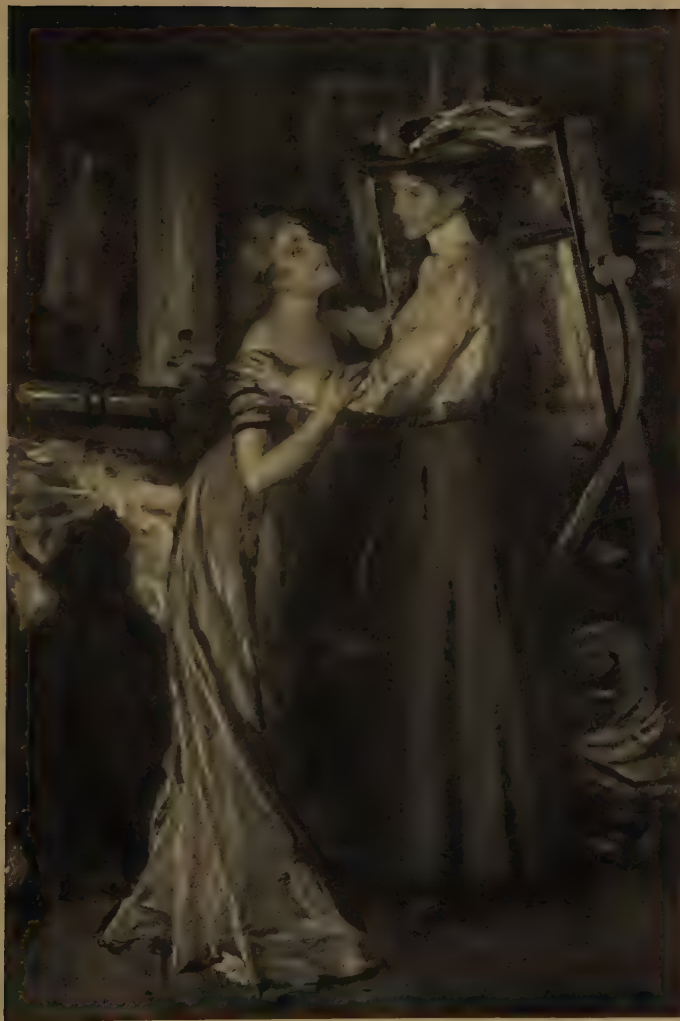
"Or yours."

"Yes—when you think of the horrors he might have got."

Laura had stroked the velvet to smoothness about her waist, and now she was pulling up a fold of lace above her breasts. As she did this she looked at her own image in the glass and smiled softly, unaware. Nina saw then that her breasts were slightly and delicately rounded; she recognized the work of life, shaping Laura's womanhood; it was the last touch of the passion that had made her body the sign and symbol of its perfection. Her own breasts heaved as the wild fang pierced them.

Then, as her fingers brushed the small white back, there surged up in her a sudden virile tenderness and comprehension. She looked at Laura with Prothero's eyes, she touched her almost with Prothero's touch. There was, after all, some advantage in being made so very like a man, since it compelled her to take Prothero's view of a little woman in a mouse-coloured velvet gown.

The gown was fastened, and the Kiddy in an innocent vanity



"Ah," she cried, "try not to hate me!"

was looking over her left shoulder and admiring her mouse-coloured tail. Of a sudden she caught sight of Nina's eyes in the glass regarding her sombrely. She turned and put up her face to Nina's, and paused, wavering. She closed her eyes and felt Nina's arms about her neck, and Nina's hands touching her hair with a subtle, quick caress, charged with confession. Laura's nerves divined it. She opened her eyes and looked at Nina.

"Ah," she cried, "try not to hate me."

Nina bowed her head. "Poor Kiddy, dear Kiddy," she whispered. "How could I?"

How could she?

She could n't, even if she tried; not even afterwards, when she sat alone in that room of hers that reminded her so intolerably of Prothero. To-night it reminded her still more intolerably of her dreadful self. She had been afraid to enter it lest it should put her to the torture. It was the place where her beast had gone out and in with her. It still crouched in the corner where she had kicked it. It was an unhappy beast, but it was not cruel any more. It could have crawled to Laura's feet and licked them.

For the Kiddy was such a little thing. It was impossible to feel hatred for anything so soft and so unintentionally sweet and small. Life had been cruel enough to Laura, before Owen married her. If it came to suffering, it was not conceivable that she should have been allowed to suffer more.

Nina put it to herself, beast or no beast, if she had had the power to take Owen from the Kiddy, to make the Kiddy suffer as she had suffered, could she have done it? Could she have borne to be, really, such a beast as that? Even if the choice had lain, innocently, between her own torture and the Kiddy's, could she have endured to see the little tender thing stretched out, in her place, on the rack? Of course she could n't.

And since she felt like that about it, beast or no beast, would n't even Owen say that she was not so dreadful after all?

She remembered then that, though he had seen through her, he had never at any time admitted that she was dreadful. He

had spoken rather as if, seeing *through* her, he had seen things she could not see, fine things which he declared to be the innermost truth of her

He must have known all the time that she would feel like that when she could bring herself to see Laura.

She saw through *him* now. That was why he had insisted on her coming. It was as if he had said to her, "I'm not thinking so tremendously of her. What I mean is that it'll be all right for you if you'll trust yourself to me; if you'll only come." He seemed to say frankly, "That beast of yours is really dreadful. It must be a great affliction to have to carry it about with you. I'll show you how to get rid of it altogether. You've only got to see her, Nina, in her heartrending innocence, wearing, if you would believe it, a mouse-coloured velvet gown."

That night Laura stood silent and thoughtful while Prothero's hands fumbled gently over the many little hooks and fastenings of the gown. She let it slide with the soft fall of its velvet from her shoulders to her feet.

"I wish," she said, "I had n't put it on."

He stooped and kissed her where the silk down of her hair sprang from her white neck.

"Does it think," he said, "that it crushed poor Nina with its beauty?"

She shook her head. She would not tell him what she thought. But the tears in her eyes betrayed her.

IT was April in a week of warm weather, of blue sky, of white clouds, and a stormy south-west wind. Brodrick's garden was sweet with dense odours of earth and sunken rain, of young grass and wallflowers thick in the borders, and with the pure smells of virgin green, of buds and branches and of lime-leaves fallen open to the sun. Outside, among the birch-trees, there was a flashing of silver stems, a shaking of green veils, and a triumphing of bright grass over the blown dust of the suburb, as the spring gave back its wildness to the Heath.

Brodrick was coming back. He had been away a fortnight, on his holiday. He was to have taken Jane with him but at the last moment she had been kept at home by some ailment of the child's. They had been married more than three years now, and they had not been separated for as many nights and days. In all his letters Brodrick had stated that he was enjoying himself immensely and could do with three months of it; and at the end of a fortnight he had sent Jane a telegram to say that he was coming back.

She was waiting for him, walking in the garden, as she used to wait for him more than three years ago, in excitement and ecstasy. The spring made her wild with the wildness of her girlhood when the white April evenings met her on her Dorset moors.

She knew again the virgin desire of desire, the poignant, incommunicable passion, when the soul knows the body's mystery and the body half divines the secret of the soul. She felt again that keen stirring of the immortal spirit in mortal sense, her veins were light, they ran fire and air, and the fine nerves aspired and adored. At moments it was as if the veils of being shook, and in their commotion all her heights and depths were ringing, reverberant to the indivisible joy.

It was so until she heard Brodrick calling to her at the gate. And at his voice her wedded blood remembered, and she came to him with the swift feet, and the flushed face uplifted, and the eyes and mouth of a bride.

Up-stairs Gertrude Collett was dressing for dinner. She looked out at her window and saw them walking up and down the long alley of the kitchen garden, like children, hand in hand.

They were late for dinner, which was the reason, Brodrick thought, why the Angel of the Dinner (as Jane called her) looked annoyed.

They were very polite and kind to her, sustaining a conversation devised and elaborated for her diversion.

Gertrude was manifestly not diverted. She congratulated Brodrick on his brilliant appearance, and said in her soft voice that his holiday had evidently done him good, and that it was a pity he had n't stayed away a little longer. Brodrick replied that he did n't want to stay away longer. He thought Gertrude looked fatigued, and suggested that a holiday would do her good. She had better take one.

"I wish you would," said Jane.

"We both," said Brodrick, "wish you would."

Gertrude said she never wanted to take holidays. She got on better without them. Jane looked at Brodrick.

"I might have gone with you," she said. "After all, Baby never did have convulsions."

"I knew he would n't," said Brodrick, and remembered that it was Gertrude who had said he would.

A pause in the dialogue robbed Gertrude's next remark of any relevance it might have had.

"We've seen," said she, "a good deal of Mr. Tanqueray. (Another pause.) "I wonder how Mrs. Tanqueray gets on."

"I imagine," said Brodrick, "that she never did get on with him."

"I meant — without him."

"Oh." He caused the conversation to flourish round another subject.

In the drawing-room, where Gertrude did not follow them all at once, Jane turned to him.

"Hugh," she said, "was I unkind to her?"

"Unkind?"

"Well, was I kind enough?"

"You are always kind," he said.

"Do you think so? Do you really think so?"

"Don't talk about her, Jinny, I've got other things to attend to."

"What things?"

He put his arm round her and drew her to their seat beside the hearth. So drawn, so held, she looked in his face and smiled that singular smile of hers that he found so adorable and incomprehensible.

"I'm tired of being made love to. I'm going," she said, "to fling off all maidenly reserve and make love to you."

She put away his arm from her and rose and seated herself with audacity on his knees.

"The devil gets into me when I have to talk to Gertrude."

She put her arm lightly and shyly about him.

"Do you mind?" she said.

"No, Jinny, I rather like it."

Her arms tightened ever so little.

"It gives you, does n't it, an agreeable sense of impropriety at your own fireside?"

She did something to his hair which made him look unlike himself or any Brodrick.

"Supposing," she said, "you repulse me? Could you repulse me?"

"No, Jinny; I don't think I ever could."

"What, not this outrageous hussy, flinging herself at your head, and rumpling your nice collar?"

She let him go that she might look at him and see how he really took it. He drew her and held her close to him in arms that trembled violently, while her lips brushed his with skimming, fugitive kisses, and kisses that lingered a moment in their flight.

"Do you like the way I make love?" she said. "And do you like my gown and the way I do my hair?"

His voice shook. "Jinny, why aren't you always like this? Why aren't you always adorable?"

"I can't be anything — always. Don't you adore me in my other moods?"

"Can you," said he, "adore a little devil when it teases?"

"I never tease you when you're tired."

"No, but I'm sometimes tired when you tease me. You are, darling, just a little bit exhausting for one man."

"Yes," said Jinny complacently; "I can exhaust you. But you can never, never exhaust me. There's always more where I came from."

"The trouble is, Jinny, that I can't always make you out. I never know where I am with you."

"But, my dear, think of having to live with a woman whom you *had* made out. Think of knowing exactly what she's going to do before she does it, and anticipating all her conversation!"

"Think," said he, "of living with a woman and never knowing precisely whether she's your wife or not your wife."

"But it solves all the matrimonial problems — how to be the exemplary father of a family and yet to slip the noose and be a bachelor again — how to break the seventh commandment —"

"Jinny!"

"The seventh commandment and yet be faithful to your marriage vows — how to obtain all the excitement of polygamy, all the relief of the divorce court without the bother and the scandal and the expense. Why can't you look at it in that light?"

"Perhaps, Jinny, because I'm not polygamous."

"You never know what you are until you're tried. Supposing you'd married Gertrude — you'd have had Gertrude, all there is of Gertrude, always Gertrude, and nothing but Gertrude. Could you have stood it?"

"Probably."

"You could n't. Before you'd been married to Gertrude six months you'd have gone, howling, to the devil. Whereas with me you've got your devil at home."

His smile admitted that there was truth in what she said. She had appealed to the adventurous and lawless spirit in him, the spirit that marked his difference from his family.

She went on with her air of reasonableness and wisdom. "I am really, though you may n't know it, the thing you need."

He saw his advantage in her mood.

"And *you*, Jinny? Don't you know that you're happiest like this?"

"Yes. I know it."

"And that when you're working like ten horses you're in misery half the time?"

"In torture." She agreed.

"And don't you know that it makes little lines come, little lines of agony on your forehead, Jinny, and purple patches under your dear eyes; and your mouth hardens."

"I know," she moaned. "I know it does. And you don't love me when I look like that?"

"I love you whatever you look like, and you know it. I love you even when you wander."

"Even? Do you mind so very much — my wandering?"

"Sometimes, perhaps, a little."

"You didn't mind at all before you married me."

"I didn't realize it then."

"Didn't realize what?"

"Your genius, Jinny, and the things it does to you."

"But you did — you did — you knew all about it."

"I knew what it meant to me."

"What *did* it mean — to you?"

He appeared to plunge into deep memories before he answered her.

"To me it was simply *the* supreme intellectual interest. It was the strongest and the strangest intellectual influence I had ever felt. You'll never quite know what it meant to me."

"And it means nothing now — you don't like it — my poor genius? And they used to say you were in love with it."

"So I was, Jinny, before I saw you."

"You were in love enough to marry it."

"I did n't marry it. It would n't marry me."

"Is that why you hate it? Darling, you can't hate it as much as I do."

"I don't hate it. But you can't expect me to love it as I love my wife."

"But I'm not your wife. Your wife would n't behave like this. Would you like me better if I did n't?"

He held her arms in his arms, fiercely and tight, crushing her.

"If," she said, "I was a virtuous woman, the sort of woman who sits on her husband's head like an uncomfortable crown?"

"Jinny — if Gertrude were to hear you!"

She loosened his arms and sat up and listened.

"I hear Gertrude," she said. "Darling, your hair's all any way. Let me straighten it. It might be used in evidence against us."

Gertrude indeed wore as she entered the ominously distant air of one who suspects a vision of iniquity. She took her place on the other side of the hearth and bent her head over her sewing. A thin stream of conversation flowed from Brodrick and from Jane, and under it she divined, she felt the tide that drew them.

She herself sat silent and smooth and cool. She sat like one removed from mortality's commotion. But it was as if she were listening to the blood that beat in Brodrick's veins, and felt in herself the passion that ran there, in secret, exulting towards its end.

At ten o'clock Jane rose and held out her hand to Gertrude. She was saying good-night. Brodrick sat abstracted for a moment. Presently he rose also and followed her with shining eyes.

Gertrude's head bent lower and lower over her sewing.

LII

BEFORE long Brodrick was aware that that month of spring had brought him the thing he most desired. He was appeased again with the hope of fatherhood. It tided him over the bad months of nineteen-seven, over the intolerable hours that Levine was giving him in the office of the "Monthly Review." It softened for him the hard fact that he could no longer afford his expensive dream. The old, reckless, personal ambition, the fantastic pride, had been overtaken by the ambition and the pride of race. He wanted to found, not a great magazine, but a family, to have more and more children like the solid little son they had called John Henry Brodrick.

The child justified the double name. The blood of the Brodricks ran in him pure. He flattered the racial and paternal pride. He grew more and more the image of what Brodrick had been at his age. It was good to think that there would be more like him. Brodrick's pride in beholding him was such that he had almost forgotten that in this question of race there would be Jane to reckon with.

In December, in the last night of nineteen-seven, a second son was born. A son so excessively small and feeble that the wonder was how he had contrived to be born at all. Brodrick when he first looked at him had a terrible misgiving. Supposing he had to face the chances of degeneration? There could be only one opinion, of course, as to the cause and the responsibility. He did not require Henry to tell him that.

Not that he could think of it just then. He could think of nothing but Jinny pausing again, uncertain, though for a shorter time, before the dreadful open door.

Nineteen-eight was the year when everything happened. Jinny was hardly out of danger when there was a crisis in the affairs of the "Monthly Review." Levine, who had been pester-

ing his brother-in-law for the last eighteen months, was pressing him hard now. The Review was passing out of Brodrick's hands. When it came to the point he realized how unwilling he was to let it go. He could only save it by buying Levine out. And he could n't do that. As the father of a family he had no business to risk more money on his unprofitable dream.

It was impossible to conceal from Jane the fact that he was worried. She saw it in his face. She lay awake, retarded somewhat in her recovery by the thought that she was responsible for that and all his worries. He had lost money over the Review and now he was going to lose the Review itself, owing, she could perfectly well see, to her high-handed editorship. It would go to his heart, she knew, to give it up; he had been so attached to his dream. It would go to her heart, too. It was in his dream, so to speak, that he had first met her; it had held them; they had always been happy together in his dream. It was his link with the otherwise inaccessible and intangible elements in her, the elements that made for separation. She was determined that, whatever went, his dream should not go. She could not forget that it had been she who had all but wrecked it in its first precarious year when she had planted George Tanqueray on an infatuated editor.

She had saved it then, and of course she could save it now. It was n't for nothing that she had been celebrated all these years. And it was n't for nothing that Hugh, poor dear, had been an angel, refusing all these years to take a penny of her earnings for the house. He had n't married her for that. And there they were, her earnings, diminished by some advances to her father's impecunious family, and by some extravagances of her own, but still swollen by much saving to a sum more than sufficient to buy Louis out.

Her genius, after all, was a valuable asset.

She lay in bed, embracing that thought, and drawing strength from it.

Before she was well enough to go out she went and confronted Louis in his office.

Levine was human. He always had been; and he was moved

by the sight of his pale sister-in-law, risen from her bed, dangerously, to do this thing. He was not hard on her. He suffered himself to be bought out for a sum less than she offered, a sum that no more than recouped him for his losses. He did n't want, he said, to make money out of the thing, he only wanted not to lose. He was glad to be quit of it.

Brodrick was very tender to her when, lying in bed again, recovering from her rash adventure, she told him what she had done. But she divined under his tenderness an acute embarrassment; she could see that he wished she had n't done it, and wished it not only for her sake but for his own. She could see that she had not, in nineteen-eight, repeated the glorious success of nineteen-three. The deed he thought so adorable when she did it in the innocence of her unwedded will, he regarded somehow as impermissible in his wife. Then, by its sheer extravagance, it was flattering to his male pride; now, by the same conspicuous quality, it was not. As for his family, it was clear that they condemned the transaction as an unjustifiable and fantastic folly. Brodrick was not sure that he did not count it as one of the disasters of nineteen-eight.

The year was thick with them. There was Jane's collapse. Jane, by a natural perversity had chosen nineteen-eight, of all years, to write a book in. She had begun the work in the spring and had broken down with the first effort.

There was not only Jane; there was Jane's child, so lamentably unlike a Brodrick. The shedding of his first crop of hair was followed by a darker down, revealing Jane. Not that anybody could have objected to Jane's hair. But there was Jane's delicacy. An alarming tendency to waste, and an incessant, violent, inveterate screaming proclaimed him her son, the heir of an unstable nervous system.

Jane's time and what strength she had were divided between her sick child and Mabel Brodrick.

For in this dreadful year Mabel had become worse. Her malady had declared itself. There were rumours and hushed hints of a possible operation. Henry was against it; he doubted whether she would survive the shock. It was not to be thought

of at present; not as long as things, he said, remained quiescent.

John Brodrick, as he waited, had grown greyer; he was gentler also and less important, less visibly the unsurprised master of the expected. The lines on his face had multiplied and softened in an expression as of wonder why this unspeakable thing should have happened to him of all men and to his wife of all women. Poor Mabel who had never done anything —

That was the way they put it now among themselves, Mabel's shortcoming. She had never done anything to deserve this misery. Lying on her couch in the square, solid house in Augustus Road, Wimbledon, Mabel covered her nullity with the imperial purple of her doom. In the family she was supreme by divine right of suffering.

Again, every day, Jane trod the path over the Heath to Wimbledon. And sometimes Henry found her at John's house and drove her back in his motor (he had a motor now). Once, boxed up with him in the closed car (it was March and the wind was cold over the Heath), she surprised him with a question.

"Henry, is it true that if Mabel had had children she'd have been all right?"

"Yes," he said curtly, wondering what on earth had made her ask him that.

"It's killing her then — not having them?"

"That," he said, "and the desire to have them."

"How cruel it is, how detestable — that she should have *this* —"

"It's Nature's revenge, Jane, on herself."

"And she was so sweet, she would have loved them —"

The Doctor brooded. He had a thing to say to her.

"Jinny, if you'd put it away — altogether — that writing of yours — you'd be a different woman."

"Different?"

"You'd be happier. And, what's more, you'd be well, too. Perfectly well."

"This is not the advice I should give you," he went on, addressing her silence, "if you were an unmarried woman. I urge my unmarried patients to work — to use their brains all

they can — and married ones, too, when they've no children. If poor Mabel had done *something* it would have been far better. But in your case, it's disastrous."

Jane remained silent. She herself had a premonition of disaster. Her restlessness was on her. Her nerves and blood were troubled again by the ungovernable, tyrannous impulse of her power. It was not the year she should have chosen, but because she had no choice she was working through everything, secretly, in defiance of Henry's orders. She wondered if he knew. He was looking at her keenly, as if he had at any rate a shrewd suspicion.

"I hardly think," he said, "it's fair to Hugh."

Henry was sure of his facts, and her silence made him surer. She *was* at it again, and the question was how to stop her?

The question was laid that night before the family committee. It met in the library at Moor Grange almost by Brodrick's invitation. Brodrick was worried. He had gone so far as to confess that he was worried about Jane. She wanted to write another book, he said, and he did n't know whether she was fit.

"Of course she is n't fit," said the Doctor. "It must be stopped. She must be made to give it up — altogether."

Brodrick inquired who was to make her? and was told that *he* was. He must put his foot down. He should have put it down before.

But Brodrick, being a Brodrick, took an unexpected line.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "that we've any right to dictate to her. It's a big question, and I think she ought to be allowed to decide it for herself."

"She is n't fit," said Henry, "to decide anything for herself."

Brodrick sent a level look at him.

"You talk," said he, "as if she was n't responsible."

"I should be very sorry to say who is and who is n't. Responsibility is a question of degree. I say Jane is not at the present moment in a state to decide."

"It sounds," said Brodrick, laughing in his bitterness, "very much as if you thought she was n't sane. Of course I know

she'd put a cheque for a hundred pounds into a drawer and forget all about it. But it would be more proof of insanity in Jinny if she remembered it was there."

"It would indeed," said Sophy.

"We're not discussing Jinny's talent for finance," said Henry.

"I suppose," said Brodrick, "what we *are* discussing is her genius?"

"I'm not saying anything at all about her genius. We've every reason to recognize her genius and be proud of it. It's not a question of her mind. It's a question of a definite bodily condition, and as you can't separate mind from body" (he shrugged his shoulders), "well—there you are. I won't say don't let her work; it's better for her to use her brain than to let it rust. But let her use it in moderation. Moderation. Not those tremendous books that take it out of her."

"Are you sure they do take it out of her? Tanqueray says she'll be ill if she doesn't write 'em."

"Tanqueray? What does he know about it?"

"More than we do, I suspect. He says the normal, healthy thing for her is to write, to write tremendous books, and she'll suffer if we thwart her. He says we don't understand her."

"Does he suggest that *you* don't understand her?" asked Sophy.

Brodrick smiled. "I think he was referring more particularly to Henry."

Henry tried to smile. "He's not a very good instance of his own theory. Look at his wife."

"That only proves that Tanqueray's books are n't good for his wife. Not that they are n't good for Tanqueray. Besides, Prothero says the same thing."

"Prothero!"

"He ought to know. He's a doctor."

Henry dismissed Prothero with a gesture.

"Look here, Hugh. It simply comes to this. Either there must be no more books or there must be no more children. You can't have both."

"There shall be no more children."

"As you like it. I don't advise it. Those books take it out of her more."

He lowered his voice.

"I consider her last book responsible for that child's delicacy."

Brodrick flinched visibly at that.

"I don't care," the Doctor went on, "what Prothero and Tanqueray say. They can't know. They don't see her. No more do you. You're out all day. I shouldn't know myself if Gertrude Collett had n't told me."

"Oh — Gertrude Collett."

"Nobody more likely to know. She's on the spot, watching her from hour to hour."

"What did she tell you?"

"Why — that she works up-stairs, in her room — for hours — when she's supposed to be lying down. She's doing it now probably."

"Gertrude knows that for a fact?"

"A fact. And she knows it was done last year too, before the baby was born."

"And I know," said Brodrick fiercely, "it was not."

"Have her in," said Sophy, "and ask her."

Brodrick had her in and asked her. Gertrude gave her evidence with a gentle air of surprise that there could be any doubt as to what Mrs. Brodrick had been up to — this year, at any rate. She flushed when Brodrick confronted her with his certainty as to last year. She could not, in the face of Brodrick's certainty, speak positively as to last year.

She withdrew herself hastily, as from an unpleasant position, and was followed by Sophy Levine.

"There's nothing for it," said Henry, "but to tell her."

"About the child?"

"About the child."

There was a terrible pause.

"Will you tell her," said Brodrick, "or shall I?"

"I'll tell her. I'll tell her now. But you must back me up."

Brodrick fetched Jane. He had found her as Gertrude had said. She was heavy-eyed, and dazed with the embraces of her dream. But when she saw the look that passed between Hugh and Henry her face was one white fear. The two were about to arraign her. She took the chair that Henry held for her.

Then he told her. And Brodrick backed him up with silence and a face averted.

It was not until Henry had left them together that he spoke to her.

"Don't take it so hardly, Jinny," he said. "It's not as if you knew."

"I might have known," she answered.

She was thinking, "George told me that I should have to pay — that there'd be no end to my paying."

LIII

THE Brodricks — Hugh — Henry — all of them — stood justified. There was, indeed, rather more justice than mercy in their attitude. She could not say that they had let her off easily. She knew (and they had taken care that she should know) the full extent of her misdoing.

That was it. They regarded her genius (the thing which had been tacked on to her) more as a crime than a misfortune. It was a power in the highest degree destructive and malign, a power utterly disintegrating to its possessor, and yet a power entirely within her own control. They refused to recognize in it any divine element of destiny, while they remained imperturbably unastonished at its course. They judged it as they would have judged any reprehensible tendency to excitement or excess. You gave way to it or you did not give way. In Jane the thing was monstrous. She had sinned through it the unforgivable sin, the sin against the family, the race.

And she had been warned often enough. They had always told her that she would have to pay for it.

But now that the event had proved them so deplorably right, now that they were established as guardians of the obvious, and masters of the expected, they said no more. They assumed no airs of successful prophecy. They were sorry for her. They gathered about her when the day of reckoning came; they could n't bear to see her paying, to think that she should have to pay. She knew that as long as she paid they would stand by her.

More than ever the family closed in round her; it stood solid, a sheltering and protecting wall.

She was almost unaware how close they were to her. It seemed to her that she stood alone there, in the centre of the circle, with her sin. Her sin was always there, never out of her

sight, in the little half-living body of the child. Her sin tore at her heart as she nursed, night and day, the little strange, dark thing, stamped with her stamp. She traced her sin in its shrunken face, its thread-like limbs, its sick nerves and bloodless veins.

There was an exaltation in her anguish. Her tenderness, shot with pain, was indistinguishable from a joy of sense. She went surrendered and subdued to suffering; she embraced passionately her pain. It appeased her desire for expiation.

They need n't have rubbed it into her so hard that it was her sin. If she could have doubted it there was the other child to prove it. John Henry Brodrick stood solid and sane, a Brodrick of the Brodricks, rosy and round with nourishment, not a nerve, Henry said, in his composition, and the stomach of a young ostrich. It was in little Hugh's little stomach and his nerves that the mischief lay. The screaming, Henry told her, was a nervous system. It was awful that a baby should have nerves.

Henry hardly thought that she would rear him. He did n't rub that in, he was much too tender. He replied to her agonized questioning that, yes, it might be possible, with infinite precaution and incessant care. With incessant care and infinite precaution she tended him. She had him night and day. She washed and dressed him; she prepared his food and fed him with her own hands. It was with a pang, piercing her fatigue, that she gave him to the nurse to watch for the two hours in the afternoon when she slept. For she had bad nights with him because of the screaming.

Brodrick had had bad nights, too. It had got on his nerves, and his digestion suffered. Jane made him sleep in a room at the other end of the house where he could n't hear the screaming. He went unwillingly, and with a sense of cowardice and shame. He could n't think how Jinny could stand it with *her* nerves.

She stood it somehow, in her passion for the child. It was her heart, not her nerves, that his screams lacerated. Beyond her heavy-eyed fatigue she showed no signs of strain. Henry

acknowledged in her that great quality of the nervous temperament, the power of rising high-strung to an emergency. He intimated that he rejoiced to see her on the right track, substituting for the unhealthy excesses of the brain the normal, wholesome life of motherhood. He was not sure now that he pitied her. He was sorrier, ten times sorrier, for his brother Hugh.

Gertrude Collett agreed with the Doctor. She insisted that it was Brodrick and not Jane who suffered. Gertrude was in a position to know. She hinted that nobody but she really did know. She saw more of him than any of his family. She saw more of him than Jane. Brodrick's suffering was Gertrude's opportunity, the open, consecrated door where she entered soft-footed, angelic, with a barely perceptible motion of her ministrant wings. Circumstances restored the old intimate relation. Brodrick was worried about his digestion; he was afraid he was breaking up altogether, and Gertrude's solicitude confirmed him in his fear. Under its influence and Gertrude's the editor spent less and less of his time in Fleet Street. He found, as he had found before, that a great part of his work could be done more comfortably at home. He found, too, that he required more than ever the co-operation of a secretary. The increased efficiency of Addy Ranger made her permanent and invaluable in Fleet Street. Jane's preoccupation had removed her altogether from the affairs of the "Monthly Review." Inevitably Gertrude slid into her former place.

She had more of Brodrick now than she had ever had; she had more of the best of him. She was associated with his ambition and his dream. Now that Jane's hand was not there to support it, Brodrick's dream had begun to sink a little, it was lowering itself almost to Gertrude's reach. She could touch it on tiptoe, straining. She commiserated Jane on her exclusion from the editor's adventures and excitements, his untiring pursuit of the young talents (his scent for them was not quite so infallible as it had been), his curious or glorious finds. Jane smiled at her under her tired eyes. She was glad that he was not alone in his dream, that he had some one, if it was only Gertrude.

For, by an irony that no Brodrick could possibly have foreseen, Jane's child separated her from her husband more than her genius had ever done. Her motherhood had the fierce ardour and concentration of the disastrous power. It was as if her genius had changed its channel and direction, and had its impulse bent on giving life to the half-living body. Nothing else mattered. She could not have travelled farther from Brodrick in her widest, wildest wanderings. The very hours conspired against them. Jane had to sleep in the afternoon, to make up for bad nights. Brodrick was apt to sleep in the evenings, after dinner, when Jane revived a little and was free.

The year passed and she triumphed. The little half-living body had quickened. The child, Henry said, would live; he might even be fairly strong. His food nourished him. He was gaining weight and substance. Jane was to be congratulated on her work which was nothing short of a miracle. *Her work; her miracle*; Henry admitted it was that. He had had to stand by and do nothing. He could n't work miracles. But if Jane had relaxed her care for a moment there was no miracle that could have saved the child.

To Jane it *was* a miracle. It was as if her folding arms had been his antenatal hiding-place; as if she had brought him forth with anguish a second time.

She would not have admitted that she loved him more than his brother. Jacky was as good as gold; but he was good with Gertrude and happy with Gertrude. The baby was neither good nor happy with anybody but Jane. Between her and the little twice-born son there was an unbreakable tie. He attached himself to his mother with a painful, pitiful passion. Out of her sight he languished. He had grown into her arms. Every time he was taken from them it was a rending of flesh from tender flesh.

His attachment grew with his strength, and she was more captured and more chained than ever. He "had" her, as Tanqueray would have said, at every turn. Frances and Sophy, the wise maternal women, shook their heads in their wisdom;

and Jane smiled in hers. She was wiser than any of them. She had become pure womanhood, she said, like Gertrude. She defied Gertrude's womanhood to produce a superior purity.

Brodrick had accepted the fact without astonishment. The instinct of paternity was strong in him. Once married to Jane her genius had become of secondary importance. The important thing was that she was his wife; and even that was not so important as it had been. Only last year he had told her, jesting, that he never knew whether she was his wife or not. He hardly knew now (they saw so little of each other); but he did know that she was the mother of his children.

In the extremity of her anguish Jane had not observed this change in Brodrick's attitude. But now she had leisure to observe. What struck her first was the way Gertrude Collett had come out. It was in proportion as she herself had become sunk in her maternal functions that Gertrude had emerged. She was amazed at the extent to which a soft-feathered angel, innocent, heaven knew, of the literary taint, could constitute herself a great editor's intellectual companion. But Gertrude's intellect retained the quality of Gertrude. In all its manifestations it was soothing and serene. And there was not too much of it — never any more than a tired and slightly deteriorated editor could stand.

Jane had observed (pitifully) the deterioration and the tiredness. A falling off in the high fineness of the "Monthly Review" showed that Brodrick was losing his perfect, his infallible scent. The tiredness she judged to be the cause of the deterioration. Presently, when she was free to take some of his work off his shoulders, he would revive. Meanwhile she was glad that he could find refreshment in his increased communion with Gertrude. She knew that he would sleep well after it. And so long as he could sleep —

She said to herself that she had done Gertrude an injustice. She was wrong in supposing that if Hugh had been married to their angel he would have tired of her, or that he would ever have had too much of her. You could n't have too much of

Gertrude, for there was, after all, so very little to have. Or else she measured herself discreetly, never giving him any more than he could stand.

But Gertrude's discretion could not disguise from Jane the fact of her ascendancy. She owed it to her very self-restraint, her amazing moderation. And, after all, what was it but the power, developed with opportunity, of doing for Brodrick whatever it was that Jane at the moment could not do? When Jane shut her eyes and tried to imagine what it would be like if Gertrude were not there, she found herself inquiring with dismay why, whatever would he do without her? What would she do herself? It was Gertrude who kept them all together. She ran the house noiselessly on greased wheels, she smoothed all Brodrick's rose-leaves as fast as Jane crumpled them. Without Gertrude there would be no peace.

Before long Jane had an opportunity of observing the fine height to which Gertrude *could* ascend. It was at a luncheon party that they gave, by way of celebrating Jane's return to the social life. The Herons were there, the young people, who had been asked without their mother, to celebrate Winny's long skirts; they and the Protheros and Caro Bickersteth. Jane was not sure that she wanted them to come. She was afraid of any disturbance in the tranquil depths of her renunciation.

Laura said afterwards that she hardly knew how they had sat through that luncheon. It was not that Jinny was n't there and Brodrick was. The awful thing was that both were so lamentably altered. Brodrick was no longer the enthusiastic editor, gathering around him the brilliant circle of the talents; he was the absorbed, depressed and ponderous man of business. It was as if some spirit that had breathed on him, sustaining him, lightening his incipient heaviness, had been removed. Jinny sat opposite him, a pale Mater Dolorosa. Her face, even when she talked to you, had an intent, remote expression, as if through it all she were listening for her child's cry. She was silent for the most part, passive in Prothero's hands. She sat unnoticed and effaced; only from time to time the young girl, Winny Heron, sent her a look from soft eyes that adored her.

On the background of Jane's silence and effacement nothing stood out except Gertrude Collett.

Prothero, who had his hostess on his right hand, had inquired as to the ultimate fate of the "Monthly Review." Jane referred him to Miss Collett on his left. Miss Collett knew more about the Review than she did.

Gertrude flushed through all her faded fairness at Prothero's appeal.

"Don't you know," said she, "that it's in Mr. Brodrick's hands entirely now?"

Prothero did know. That was why he asked. He turned to Jane again. He was afraid, he said, that the Review, in Brodrick's hands, would be too good to live.

"Is it too good to live, Gertrude?" said she.

Gertrude looked at Brodrick as if she thought that *he* was.

"I don't think Mr. Brodrick will let it die," she said. "If he takes a thing up you can trust him to carry it through. He can fight for his own. He's a born fighter."

Down at her end of the table beside Brodrick, Laura listened.

"It has been a bit of a struggle, I imagine, up till now," said Prothero to Jane.

"Up till now" (it was Gertrude who answered) "his hands have been tied. But now it's absolutely his own thing. He has realized his dream."

If she had seen Prothero's eyes she would have been reminded that Brodrick's dream had been realized for him by his wife. She saw nothing but Brodrick. For Gertrude the "Monthly Review" *was* Brodrick.

She drew him for Prothero's benefit as the champion of the lost cause of literature. She framed the portrait as it were in a golden laurel wreath.

Eddy Heron cried, "Hear, hear!" and "Go it, Gertrude!" and Winny wanted to know if her uncle's ears were n't tingling. She was told that an editor's ears were past tingling. But he flushed slightly when Gertrude crowned herself and him. They were all listening to her now.

"I assure you," she was saying, "*we* are not afraid."

She was one with Brodrick, his interests and his dream.

She was congratulated (by Jane) on her championship of the champion, and Brodrick was heard murmuring something to the effect that nobody need be frightened; they were safe enough.

It struck Laura that Brodrick looked singularly unsatisfied for a man who has realized his dream.

"All the same," said Prothero, "it was rash of you to take those poems I sent you."

"Dear Owen," said Jane, "do you think they'll sink him?"

"As far as that goes," Brodrick said, "we're going to have a novel of George Tanqueray's. That'll show you what we can afford."

"Or what George can afford," said Jane. It was the first spark she had emitted. But it consumed the heavy subject.

"By the way," said Caro Bickersteth, "where is George Tanqueray?"

Laura said that he was somewhere in the country. He was always in the country now.

"Without his wife," said Caro, and nobody contradicted her. She went on.

"You great geniuses ought not to marry, any more than lunatics. The law ought to provide for it. Genius, in either party, if you can establish the fact, should annul the contract, like — like any other crucial disability."

"Or," Jane amended, "why not make the marriage of geniuses a criminal act, like suicide? You can always acquit them afterwards on the ground of temporary insanity."

"How would you deal," said Brodrick suddenly, "with mixed marriages?"

"Mixed ——?" Caro feigned bewilderment.

"When a norm — an ordinary — person marries a genius? It's a racial difference."

("Distinctly," Caro murmured.)

"And would n't it be hard to say which side the lunacy was on?"

Laura would have suspected him of a bitter personal inten-

tion had it not been so clear that Jinny's genius was no longer in question, that her flame was quenched.

It was Caro who asked (in the drawing-room, afterwards) if they might see the children.

Gertrude went up-stairs to fetch them. Eddy Heron watched her softly retreating figure, and smiled and spoke.

"I say, Gee-Gee's going strong, is n't she?"

Everybody affected not to hear him, and the youth went on smiling to his unappreciated self.

Gertrude appeared again presently, bringing the children. On the very threshold little Hugh struggled in her arms and tried to hurl himself on his mother. His object attained, he turned his back on everybody and hung his head over Jane's shoulder.

But little John Henry was admirably behaved. He wandered from guest to guest, shaking hands, in his solemn urbanity, with each. He looked already absurdly unastonished and important. He was not so much his father's son as the son of all the Brodricks. As for little Hugh, it was easy enough, Prothero said, to see whose son *he* was. And Winny Heron cried out in an ecstasy that he was going to be a genius, she was sure of it.

"Heaven forbid," said Brodrick. Everybody heard him.

"Oh, Uncle Hughy, if he was like Jin-Jin!" Allurement and tender reproach mingled in Winny's tone.

She turned to Jane with eyes that adored and loved and defended her. "I wish you'd have dozens of babies — darlings — like yourself."

"And I wish," said Eddy, "she'd have dozens of books like her last one."

Eddy was standing, very straight and tall, on his uncle's hearth. His chin, which was nothing if not determined, was thrust upwards and outwards over his irreproachable high collar. Everybody looked at Eddy as he spoke.

"What I want to know is why she does n't have them? What have you all been doing to her? What have *you* been doing to her, Uncle Hughy?"

He looked round on all of them, with the challenge of his young eyes.

"It's all very well, you know, but I agree with Miss Bickersteth. If you're a genius you've no business to marry — I mean nobody's any business to marry you."

"Mine," said Caro suavely, "was a purely abstract proposition."

But the terrible youth went on. "Mine is n't. Uncle Hugh's done a good thing for himself, I know. But it would have been a jolly sight better thing for literature if he'd married Gee-Gee, or somebody like that."

For there was nothing that young Eddy did not permit himself to say.

Little Hugh had begun to cry bitterly, as if he had understood that there had been some reflection on his mother. And from crying he went on to screaming, and Gertrude carried him, struggling violently, from the room.

The screams continued in the nursery overhead. Jane sat for a moment in agony, listening, and then rushed up-stairs.

Gertrude appeared, serene and apologetic.

"Can't anything be done," Brodrick said irritably, "to stop that screaming?"

"It's stopped now," said Winny.

"You've only got to give him what he wants," said Gertrude.

"Yes, and he knows he's only got to scream for it."

Gertrude's eyebrows, raised helplessly, were a note on the folly and infatuation of the child's mother.

Caro Bickersteth and Laura left, hopeless of Jane's return to them. Prothero stayed on, conferring with the editor. Later, he found himself alone in the garden with Jane. He asked then (what they were all longing to know) when she was going to give them another book?

"Never again, Owen, never again."

He reproached her.

"Ah — you don't know what it's been, this last year," she said. "George told me I should have to pay for it. So did Nina. And you see how I've paid."

His eyes questioned her..

"Through my child."

He turned to her. His eyes were pitiful but incredulous.

"Owen — Nina said there'd be no end to my paying. But there shall be an end to it. For a year it's been one long fight for his little life, and I've won; but he'll never be strong; never, I'm afraid, like other children. He'll always remind me ——"

"Remind you?"

"Yes. They say I'm responsible for him. It's the hard work I've done. It's my temperament — my nerves."

"Your nerves?"

"Yes. I'm supposed to be hopelessly neurotic."

"But you're not. Your nerves are very highly-strung — they're bound to be, or they would n't respond as perfectly as they do — but they're the *soundest* nerves I know. I should say you were sound all over."

"Should you?"

"Certainly."

"Then" (she almost cried it) "why should he suffer?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know what's the matter with him?"

"Owen ——"

"He's a Brodrick. He's got their nerves."

"Their nerves? I did n't know they had any."

"They've all got them except Mrs. Levine. It's the family trouble. Weak nerves and weak stomachs."

"But Henry ——"

"He has to take no end of care of himself."

"How do you know?"

"It's my business," he said, "to know."

"I keep on forgetting that you're a doctor too." She meditated. "But Sophy's children are all strong."

"No, they're not. Levine told me the other day that they were very anxious about one of them."

"Is it — the same thing that my child has?"

"Precisely the same."

"And it comes," she said, "from them. And they never told me."

"They must have thought you knew."

"I did n't. They made me think it was my fault. They let me go through all that agony and terror. I can't forgive them."

"They could n't have known."

"There was Henry. He must have known. And yet he made me think it. He made me give up writing because of that."

"You need n't think it any more. Jacky gets his constitution from you, and it was you who saved the little one."

"He made me think I'd killed him. It's just as well," she said, "that I should have thought it. If I had n't I might n't have fought so hard to make him live. I might have been tormented with another book. It was the only thing that could have stopped me."

She paused. "Perhaps — they knew that."

"It's all right," she said presently. "After all, if there is anything wrong with the child, I'd rather Hugh did n't think it came from him."

She had now another fear. It made her very tender to Brodrick when, coming to him in the drawing-room after their guests had departed, she found him communing earnestly with Gertrude. A look passed between them as she entered.

"Well, what are you two putting your heads together about?" she said.

Gertrude's head drew back as if a charge had been brought against it.

"Well," said Brodrick, "it was about the child. Something must be done. You can't go on like this."

She seated herself. Her very silence implied that she was all attention.

"It's bad for him and it's bad for you."

"What's bad for him?"

"The way you've given yourself up to him. There's no moderation about your methods."

"If there had been," said she, "he would n't be alive now."

"Yes, yes, I know that. But he's all right now. He does n't want that perpetual attention. It's ruining him. He thinks he's only got to scream loud enough for anything and he gets it."

Every time he screams you rush to him. It's preposterous." Jane listened.

"The fact is," said Brodrick, bracing himself, "you have him too much with you."

"I *must* have him with me."

"You must n't," said Brodrick, with his forced gentleness.

"You think I'm bad for him?"

He did not answer.

"Gertrude — do *you* think I'm bad for him?"

Gertrude smiled. She did not answer any more than Brodrick.

"Miss Collett agrees with me," said Brodrick.

"She always does. What do I do to him?"

"You excite him."

"Do I, Gertrude?"

Gertrude's face seemed to be imploring Brodrick to be pitiful, and not to rub it in.

"Do I?"

"The child," said Gertrude evasively, "is very sensitive."

"And you create," Brodrick said, "an atmosphere ——"

"A what?"

"An atmosphere of perpetual agitation — of emotion ——"

"You mean my child is fond of me."

"Much too fond of you. It's playing the devil with him."

"Poor mite — at *his* age! Well — what do you propose?"

"I propose that he should be with somebody who has n't that effect, who can keep him quiet. Miss Collett very kindly offered ——"

"Dear Gertrude, you can't. You've got your hands full."

"Not so full that they can't hold a little more." Gertrude said it with extreme sweetness.

"Can they hold Hughy?"

"They've held Jacky," said Brodrick, "for the last year. *He* never gives any trouble."

"He never feels it. Poor Baby has got nerves ——"

"Well, my dear girl, is n't it all the more reason why he should be with somebody who has n't got 'em?"

"Poor Gertrude, she'll have more nerves than any of us if she has to look after the house, and the accounts, and Jacky, and Hughy, and *you* ——"

"She does n't look after me," said Brodrick stiffly, and left the room.

Jane turned to Gertrude.

"Was that your idea, or his?"

"How can any idea be mine," said Gertrude, "if I always agree with Mr. Brodrick? As a matter of fact it was the Doctor's."

"Yes. It was very like him."

"He spoke to Mr. Brodrick yesterday. And I am glad he did."

"Why are you glad?"

"Because it was taken out of my hands. I don't want you to think that I interfere, that I put myself forward, that I suggested this arrangement about the children. If it's to be, you must understand distinctly that I and my ideas and my wishes have nothing to do with it. If I offered myself it was because I was compelled. Mr. Brodrick was at his wits' end."

("Poor dear, I drove him there," said Jane.)

"It's put me in a very difficult position. I have to appear to be taking everything on myself, to be thrusting myself in everywhere, whereas the truth is I can only keep on" (she closed her eyes, as one dizzied with the perilous path she trod) "by ignoring myself, putting myself altogether on one side."

"Do you hate it?" Jane said softly.

"No. It's the only way. But sometimes one is foolish — one looks for a little recognition and reward ——"

Jane put her hands on the other woman's shoulders and gazed into her face.

"We do recognize you," she said, "even if we don't reward you. How can we, when you've done so much?"

"My reward would be — not to be misunderstood."

"Do I misunderstand you? Does *he*?"

"Mr. Brodrick? Never."

"I, then?"

"You? I think you thought I wanted to come between you and the children."

"I never thought you wanted to come between me and anything."

Her hands that held her dropped.

"But you're right, Gertrude. I'm a brute and you're an angel."

She turned from her and left her there.

LIV

SHE knew that she had dealt a wound, and she was sorry for it. It was awful to see Gertrude going about the house in her flagrant secrecy. It was unbearable to Jane, Gertrude's soft-flaming, dedicated face, and that little evasive, sacred look of hers, as if she had her hand for ever on her heart, hiding her wound. It was a look that reminded Jane, and was somehow, she felt, intended to remind her, that Gertrude was pure spirit as well as pure womanhood in her too discernible emotion. Was it not spiritual to serve as she served, to spend as she spent herself, so angelically, bearing the dreadful weight of Brodrick's marriage — the consequences, so to speak, of that corporeal tie — on her winged shoulders?

She could see that Hugh looked at it in that light (as well he might) when one evening he spoke remorsefully of the amount they put on her.

A month had passed since he had given the care of his children into Gertrude's hands. She was up-stairs now superintending their disposal for the night. He and Jane were alone in a half-hour before dinner, waiting for John and Henry and the Protheros to come and dine. The house was very still. Brodrick could not have believed that it was possible, the perfection of the peace that had descended on them. He appealed to Jane. She could n't deny that it was peace.

Jane did n't deny it. She had nothing whatever to say against an arrangement that had turned out so entirely for the children's good. She kept her secret to herself. Her secret was that she would have given all the peace and all the perfection for one scream of Hughy's and the child's arms round her neck.

"You would n't know," Brodrick said, "that there was a child in the house."

Jane agreed. Ah, yes, if *that* was peace, they had it.

Well, was n't it? After that infernal row he made? You could n't say anything when the poor little chap was ill and could n't help it, but you could n't have let him cultivate screaming as a habit. It was wonderful the effect that woman had on him. He could n't think how she did it. It was as if her mere presence in a room —

He thought that Jane was going to admit that as she had admitted everything, but as he looked at her he saw that her mouth had lifted at its winged corners, and her eyes were darting their ominous light.

"It's awful of me, I know," she said, "but her presence in a room — in the house, Hugh — makes me feel as if *I* could scream the roof off."

(He glanced uneasily at her.)

"She makes me want to *do* things."

"What things?" he inquired mildly.

"The things I must n't — to break loose — to kick over the traces —"

"You don't surprise me." He smoothed his face to the expression proper to a person unsurprised, dealing imperturbably with what he had long ago foreseen.

"Sometimes I think that if Gertrude were not so good, I might be more so. You're all so good," she said. "*You* are so good, so very, very good."

"I observe," said Brodrick, "a few elementary rules, as you do yourself."

"But I don't want," she said, "to observe them any more. I want to put my foot through all the rules."

The front door bell rang as the chiming clock struck eight.

"That's John," he said, "and Henry."

"Did you ever put your foot through a rule? Did John? Did Henry? Fancy John setting out on an adventure with his hair brushed like that and his spectacles on —"

They were announced. She rose to greet them. They waited. The clock with its soft silver insistence struck the quarter. It was awful, she said, to have to live with a clock that struck the

quarter; and Henry shook his head at her and said, "Nerves, Jinny, nerves."

John looked at his watch. "I thought," said John, "you dined at eight."

"So did I," said Brodrick. He turned to Jane. "Your friend Prothero does not observe the rule of punctuality."

"If they won't turn up in time," said Henry, "I should dine without them."

They did dine ultimately. Prothero turned up at a quarter to nine, entering with the joint. Laura was not with him. Laura could n't, he said, "get off."

He was innocent and unconscious of offence. They were not to bring back the soup or fish. Roast mutton was enough for him. He expected he was a bit late. He had been detained by Tanqueray. Tanqueray had just come back.

Involuntarily Brodrick looked at Jane.

Prothero had to defend her from a reiterated charge of neurosis brought against her by Henry, who observed with disapproval her rejection of roast mutton.

Over coffee and cigarettes Prothero caught him up and whirled him in a fantastic flight around his favourite subject.

There were cases, he declared, where disease was a higher sort of health. "Take," he said, "a genius with a pronounced neurosis. His body may be a precious poor medium for all ordinary purposes. But he could n't have a more delicate, more lyrical, more perfectly adjusted instrument for *his* purposes than the nervous system you call diseased."

When he had gone Henry shook off the discomfort of him with a gesture.

"I've no patience with him," he said.

"He would n't expect you to have any," said Jane. "But you've no idea of the patience he would have with *you*."

She herself was conscious of a growing exasperation.

"I've no use for him. A man who deliberately constructs his own scheme of the universe, in defiance," said Henry, "of the facts."

"Owen could n't construct a scheme of anything if he tried.

Either he sees that it's so, or he feels that it's so, or he knows that it's so, and there's nothing more to be said. It's not a bit of good arguing with him."

"I should n't attempt to argue with him, any more than I should argue with a lunatic."

"You consider him a lunatic, do you?"

"I consider him a very bad neurotic."

"If you can't have genius without neurosis," said Jane, "give me neurosis. You need n't look at me like that, Henry. I know you think I've got it."

"My dear Jane ——"

"You would n't call me your dear Jane if you did n't."

"We're wandering from the point. I think all I've ever said was that Prothero may be as great a poet, and as neurotic as you please, but he's nothing of a physiologist, nor, I should imagine, of a physician."

"There you're wrong. He did splendid work out in Africa and India. He's got as good a record as you have in your own profession. It's no use your looking as if you wished he had n't, for he has."

"You mistake me. I am delighted to hear it. In that case, why does n't he practise, instead of living on his wife?"

"He does n't live on her. His journalism pays for his keep — if we're going to be as vulgar as all that."

Jinny was in revolt.

"I imagine all the same," said John, "that Prothero's wife is considerably the better man."

"She'd hate you if she knew you'd said so."

"Prothero's wife," said Henry, "is a lady for whom I have the very highest admiration. But Prothero is impossible. *Im* — possible."

Jane left the room.

IT seemed to have struck everybody all at once that Prothero was impossible. That conviction was growing more and more upon his publishers. His poems, they assured him, were no longer worth the paper they were written on. As for his job on the "Morning Telegraph," he was aware that he held it only on sufferance, drawing a momentary and precarious income. He owed everything to Brodrick. He depended on Brodrick. He knew what manner of men these Brodricks were. Inexhaustibly kind to undeserved misfortune, a little impatient of mere incompetence, implacable to continuous idiocy. Prothero they regarded as a continuous idiot.

His impossibility appeared more flagrant in the face of Laura's marvellous achievement. Laura's luck persisted (she declared) because she could n't bear it, because it was a fantastic refinement of torture to be thrust forward this way in the full blaze, while Owen, withdrawn into the columns of the "Morning Telegraph," became increasingly obscure. It made her feel iniquitous, as if she had taken from him his high place and his praise. Of course she knew that it was not *his* place or *his* praise that she had taken; degradation at the hands of her appraisers set him high. Obscurity, since it meant secrecy, was what he had desired for himself, and what she ought to have desired for him. She knew the uses of unpopularity. It kept him perfect; sacred in a way, and uncontaminated. It preserved, perpetually, the clearness of his vision. His genius was cut loose from everything extraneous: It swung in ether, solitary and pure, a crystal world, not yet breathed upon.

She would not have had it otherwise. It was through Owen's obscurity that her happiness had become so secure and so complete. It made her the unique guardian of a high and secret

shrine. She had never been one who could be carried away by emotion in a crowd. The presence of her fellow-worshippers had always checked her impulse to adore. It was as much as she could do to admit two or three holy ones, Nina or Jane or Tanqueray, to a place beside her where she knelt.

As for the wretched money that he worried about, she would n't have liked him to have made it, if he could. An opulent poet was ridiculous, the perversion of the sublime. If one of them was to be made absurd by the possession of a large and comfortable income she preferred that it should be she.

The size of Laura's income, contrasted, as Prothero persisted in contrasting it, with her own size, was excessively absurd. Large and comfortable as it appeared to Prothero, it was not yet so large nor was it so comfortable that Laura could lie back and rest on it. She was heartrending, irritating, maddening to Prothero in her refusals to lie back on it and rest. She toiled prodigiously, incessantly, indefatigably. She implored Prothero to admit that if she was prodigious and incessant, she *was* indefatigable, she never tired. There was nothing wonderful in what she did. She had caught the silly trick of it. It could be done, she assured him, standing on your head. She enjoyed doing it. The wonderful thing was that she should be paid for her enjoyment, instead of having to pay for it, like other people. He argued vainly that once you had achieved an income it was no longer necessary to set your teeth and go at it like that.

And the more he argued the more Laura laughed at him. "I can't help it," she said; "I've got the habit. You'll never break me of it, after all these years."

For the Kiddy, even in her affluence, was hounded and driven by the memory of her former poverty. She had no illusions. She had never had them; and there was nothing spectral about her fear. After all, looking at it sanely, it did n't amount to so very much, what she had made. And it was n't really an income; it was only a little miserable capital. It had no stability. It might at any moment cease. She might have an illness, or Owen might have one; he very probably would, considering the pace *he* went at it. Or the "Morning Telegraph" might throw

him over. All sorts of things might happen. In her experience they generally did.

Of course, in a way Owen was right. They didn't want all the money. But what he didn't see was that you had to make ten times more than you wanted, in order to secure, ultimately, an income. And then, in the first excitement of it, she had rather launched out. To begin with, she had bought the house, to keep out the other lodgers. They were always bringing coughs and colds about the place and giving them to Owen. And she had had two rooms thrown into one so as to give Owen's long legs space to ramp up and down in. The den he had chosen had been too small for him. He was better, she thought, since he had had his great room. The house justified itself. It was reassuring to know that whatever happened they would have a roof over their heads. But it could not be denied that she had been extravagant.

And Owen had been the least shade extravagant too. He had found a poet even more unpopular, more impecunious than himself, a youth with no balance, and no power to right himself when he toppled over; and he had given him a hundred pounds in one lump sum to set him on his legs again. And on the top of that he had routed out a tipsy medical student from a slum, and "advanced him," as the medical student put it, twenty pounds to go to America with.

He had just come to her in her room where she sat toiling, and had confessed with a childlike, contrite innocence the things that he had done.

"It was a sudden impulse," he said. "I yielded to it."

"Oh, Owen dear, don't have another soon. These impulses are ruinous."

He sat down, overburdened with his crime, a heartrending spectacle to Laura.

"Well," she said, "I suppose it was worth it. It must have given you an exquisite pleasure."

"It did. That's where the iniquity comes in. It gave me an exquisite pleasure at your expense."

"You give me an exquisite pleasure," she said, "in everything you do."

Her lips made a sign for him to come to her, and he came and knelt at her feet and took her hands in his. He bowed his head over them and kissed them.

"Do you know what you are?" she said. "You're a divine prodigal."

"Yes," he said, kissing her, "I'm a prodigal, a dissolute, good-for-nothing wastrel. I adore you and your little holy hands; but I'm not the least use to you. You ink your blessed little fingers to the bone for me, and I take your earnings and fling them away — in — in —" He grew incoherent with kissing.

"In one night's spiritual debauchery," said she. She was pleased with her way of putting it; she was pleased, immeasurably pleased with him.

But Owen was not pleased in the very least.

"That," said he, "is precisely what I do."

He rose and stood before her, regarding her with troubled, darkening eyes. He was indeed a mark for the immortal ironies. He had struggled to support and protect her, this unspeakably dear and inconceivably small woman; he looked on her still as a sick child whom he had made well, and here he was, living on her, living on Laura. The position was incredible, abominable, but it was his.

She looked at him with deep-blue, adoring eyes, and there was a pain in her heart as she saw how thin his hands were, and how his clothes hung away from his sunken waist.

"Oh," she cried, "what a little beast I am, to make you feel like that, when you're journalizing and agonizing day and night, and when it's your own savings that you flung. It *was*, dear," she insisted.

"Yes, and as I've flung them, I'll have to live on you for a year at least. It all comes back to that."

"I wish *you* would n't come back to it. Can't you see, can't you see," she implored, "how, literally, I'm living on you?"

"If you only did!"

"But I do, I do. In the real things, the things that matter. I cling and suck like a vampire. Why can't you have the courage of your opinions?"

"My opinions? I haven't any. Hence, no doubt, my lack of courage."

"Your convictions, then, whatever you call the things you *do* have. You think, and *I* think, that money does n't matter. You won't even allow that it exists, and for you it does n't exist, it can't. Well then, why make such a fuss about it? And what does it matter which of us earns it, or who spends it?"

He seemed to be considering her point. Then he put it violently from him.

"That's the argument of all the humbugs, all the consecrated hypocrites that have ever been. All the lazy, long-haired, rickety freaks and loafers who go nourishing their damned spirituality at some woman's physical expense. The thing's indecent, it's unspeakable. Those Brodricks are perfectly right."

Laura raised her head. "They? What have they got to do with you and me?"

"A good deal. They supply me with work, which they don't want me to do, in order to keep me from sponging on my wife. They are admirable men. They represent the sanity and decency of the world in pronouncing judgment on the fact. No Brodrick ever blinked a fact. When people ask the Brodricks, What does that fellow Prothero do? they shrug their shoulders and say, 'He has visions, and his wife pays for them.'"

"But I don't. It's the public that pays for them. And your wife has a savage joy in making it pay. If it was n't for that I should loathe my celebrity more than Jinny ever loathed hers. It makes me feel sillier."

"Poor little thing," said Prothero.

"Well—it's hard that *I* should have to entertain imbeciles who would n't read *you* if they were paid."

He knew that that was the sting of it for her.

"They're all right," he said. "It's your funny little humour that they like. I like it, too."

But Laura snapped her teeth and said, "Damn! Damn my humour! Well — when they use it as a brickbat to hurl at your head."

She quoted furiously, "'While her husband still sings to deaf ears, Mrs. Prothero has found the secret of capturing her public. She has made her way straight to its heart. And the heart of Mrs. Prothero's public is unmistakably in the right place.' Oh — if Mrs. Prothero's public knew what Mrs. Prothero thinks of it. I give them what they want, do I? As if I gave it them because they want it. If they only knew why I give it, and how I'm fooling them all the time! How I make them pay — for *you*! Just think, Owen, of the splendid, the diabolical irony of it!"

"So very small," he murmured, "and yet so fierce."

"Just think," she went on, "how I'm enjoying myself."

"Just think," said Prothero, "how I am not."

"Then" (she returned it triumphantly), "you're paying for my enjoyment, which is what you want."

The clock struck six. She went out of the room, and returned, bringing an overcoat which she said had grown miles too big for him. She warmed it at the fire and helped him on with it, and disappeared for a moment under its flapping wings, so large was that overcoat.

All the way to Fleet Street, Prothero, wrapped in his warm overcoat, meditated tenderly on his wife's humour.

NOTHING, Tanqueray said, could be more pathetic than the Kiddy spreading her diminutive skirts before Prothero, to shelter that colossal figure.

But the Kiddy, ever since Tanqueray had known her, had refused to be pathetic; she had clenched her small fists to repel the debilitating touch of sympathy. She was always breaking loose from the hands that tried to restrain her, always facing things in spite of her terror, always plunging, armoured, indomitable, into the thick of the fight. And she had always come through somehow, unconquered, with her wounds in front. The wounds he had divined rather than seen, ever since he, in their first deplorable encounter, had stuck a knife into her. She had turned that defeat, he remembered, into a brilliant personal triumph; she had forced him to admire her; she had worn over that mark, as it were, a gay and pretty gown.

And now, again, Tanqueray was obliged to abandon his vision of her pathos. The spectacle she presented inspired awe rather and amazement; though all that she called on you to observe, at the moment, was merely an insolent exhibition of a clever imp. The Kiddy was minute, but her achievements were enormous; she was ridiculous, but she was sublime.

She sat tight, tighter than ever, and went on. She wrote one charming book after another, at astonishingly short intervals, with every appearance of immemorial ease. She flung them to her scrambling public with a side wink at her friends. "They don't know how I'm fooling them," was her reiterated comment on her own performances.

Tanqueray exulted over them. They all went to Prothero's profit and his peace. It was not in him to make light of her popularity, or cast it in her hilarious face. Nor could he hope to equal her own incomparable levity. She would come to him,

laughing, with the tale of her absurdly soaring royalties, and he would shout with her when she cried, "The irony of it, Tanks, the delicious irony! It all goes down to his account."

"He's got another ready for them," she announced one day.

She always spoke of her husband's poems as if they were so many bombs, hurled in the face of the enemy, her public. There was nothing like the pugnacity of the Kiddy in these years of Prothero's disaster.

She came to Tanqueray one evening, the evening before publication; she came secretly, while Owen was in Fleet Street. Her eyes blazed in a premature commencement of hostilities. She had come forth, Tanqueray knew, to brave it out, to show her serenity, and the coolness of her courage on the dreadful eve.

It was impossible to blink the danger. Prothero could not possibly escape this time. He had gone, as Tanqueray said, one better than his recent best. And Laura had got a book out, too, an enchanting book. It looked as if they were doomed, in sheer perversity, to appear together. Financial necessity, of course, might have compelled them to this indiscretion. Laura was bound eventually to have a book, to pay for Prothero's; there was n't a publisher in London now who would take the risk of him. But as likely as not these wedded ones flung themselves thus on the public in a superb disdain, just to prove how little they cared what was said about them.

Laura was inclined to be reticent, but Tanqueray drew her out by congratulating her on her popularity, on the way she kept it up.

"Oh," she cried, "as if I did n't know what you think of it. Me and my popularity!"

"You don't know, and you don't care, you disgraceful Kiddy."

She lifted her face, a face tender and a little tremulous, that yet held itself bravely to be smitten as it told him that indeed she did not care.

"I think your popularity, *and* you, my child, the most beautiful sight I've ever seen for many a long year."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You may laugh at me," she said.

"'E is n't laughin' at you," Rose interjected. She was generally admitted to Tanqueray's conferences with Laura. She sat by the fire with her knees very wide apart, nursing Minny.

"He is n't, indeed," said Tanqueray. "He thinks you a marvellous Kiddy; and he bows his knee before your popularity. How you contrive to turn anything so horrible into anything so adorable he does n't know and never will know."

"Dear me. I'm only dumping down earth for Owen's roses."

"That's what I mean. That's the miracle. Every novel you write blossoms into a splendid poem."

It was what she meant. She had never meant anything so much. It was the miracle that her marriage perpetually renewed for her, this process of divine transmutation, by which her work passed into Owen's and became perfect. It passed, if you like, through a sordid medium, through pounds and shillings and pence, but there again, the medium itself was transmuted, sanctified by its use, by the thing accomplished. She touched a consummation beyond consummation of their marriage.

"I'm glad you see it as I do," she said. She had not thought that he would see.

"Of course I see it." He sat silent a moment regarding his vision; smooth-browed, close-lipped, a purified and transmuted Tanqueray.

"What do you expect," he said presently, "to happen?"

"I expect what always has happened, and worse."

"So do I. I said in the beginning that he had n't a chance. There is n't a place for him anywhere in his own generation. He might just as well go on the Stock Exchange and try to float a company by singing to the brokers. It's a generation of brokers."

"Beasts!"

"Aunt's lodger is a broker," said Rose. "Old furniture—real—and pictures is 'is line."

"Aunt's lodger, I assure you, will be thoroughly well damned if he takes any stock in Owen."

"'E 'as n't seen Mr. Prothero," said Rose, "and you'll frighten Minny if you use such language."

Tanqueray ignored the interruption. "Owen, you see, is dangerous. He regards the entire Stock Exchange as a bankrupt concern. The Stock Exchange resents the imputation and makes things dangerous for Owen. If a man will insist on belonging to all the centuries that have been, and all the centuries that will be, he's bound to have a bad time in his own. You can't have it both ways."

"I know. He knows it. We'd rather have it this way. I ought n't to talk as if he minded, as if it could touch him where he is. It's me it hurts, not him."

"It hurts me, too, Kiddy. I can't stand it when I see the filthy curs rushing at him. They've got to be kicked into a corner. I'm prepared for them, this time."

He rose and went to his desk and returned with an article in proof which he gave to her.

"Just look through that and see if it's any good."

It was his vindication of Owen Prothero.

"Oh ——"

She drew in her breath. "How you *have* fought for him."

"I'm fighting for my own honour and glory, too."

He drew her attention to a passage where he called upon Heaven to forbid that he should appear to apologize for so great a man. He was only concerned with explaining why Prothero was and would remain unacceptable to a generation of brokers; which was not so much a defence of Prothero as an indictment of his generation. She would see how he had rubbed it in.

She followed, panting a little in her excitement, the admirable points he made. There, where he showed that there was no reason why this Celt should be an alien to the Saxon race. Because (her heart leaped as she followed) his genius had all the robust and virile qualities. He was not the creature of a creed, or a conviction, or a theory; neither was he a fantastic dreamer. He was a man of realities, the very type (Tanqueray had rubbed that well in) that hard-headed Englishmen

adore, a surgeon, a physician, a traveller, a fighter among fighting men. He had never blinked a fact (Laura smiled as she remembered how Owen had said that that was what a Brodrick never did); he had never shirked a danger. But (Tanqueray, in a new paragraph, had plunged into the heart of his subject) on the top of it all he was a seer; a man who saw *through* the things that other men see. And to say that he saw, that he saw through things, was the humblest and simplest statement of his case. To him the visible world was a veil worn thin by the pressure of the reality behind it; it had the translucence that belongs to it in the form of its eternity. He was in a position to judge. He had lived face to face and hand to hand with all forms of corporeal horror, and there was no mass of disease or of corruption that he did not see in its resplendent and divine transparency. It was simple and self-evident to him that the world of bodies was made so and not otherwise. It was also clear as daylight that the entire scheme of things existed solely to unfold and multiply and vary the everlasting-to-everlasting-world-without-end communion between God and the soul. To him this communion was a fact, a fact above all facts, the supremely and only interesting fact. It was so natural a thing that he sang about it as spontaneously as other poets sing about their love and their mistresses. So simple and so self-evident was it that he had called his latest and greatest poems "Transparences."

"It sounds," she said, "as if you saw what he sees."

"I don't," said Tanqueray. "I only see *him*."

At that, all of a sudden, the clever imp broke down.

"George," she said, "I love you — I don't care if Rose *does* hear — I love you for defending him."

"Love me for something else. He does n't need defending."

"Not he! But all the same I love you."

It was as if she had drawn aside a fold of her pretty garment and shown him, where the scar had been, a jewel, a pearl with fire in the white of it.



"George," she said, . . . "I love you for defending him"

LVII

THEY were right. Worse things were reserved for Prothero than had happened to him yet. Even Caro Bickersteth had turned. Caro had done her best to appreciate competently this creator adored by creators. Caro, nourished on her "Critique of Pure Reason," was trying hard to hold the balance of justice in the "Morning Telegraph"; and according to Caro there was a limit. She had edited Shelley and she knew. She was frankly, as she said, unable to follow Mr. Prothero in his latest flight. There was a limit even to the imagination of the mystic, and to the poet's vision of the Transcendent. There were, Caro said, regions of ether too subtle to sustain even so imponderable a poet as Mr. Prothero. So there was n't much chance, Tanqueray remarked, of their sustaining Caro.

But the weight of Caro's utterances increased, as they circulated, formidably, among the right people. All the little men on papers declared that there was a limit, and that Prothero had passed it.

It was barely a year since the publication of his last volume, and they were annoyed with Prothero for daring to show his face again so soon in the absence of encouragement. It looked as if he did n't care whether they encouraged him or not. Such an attitude in a person standing on his trial amounted to contempt of court. When his case came up for judgment in the papers, the jury were reminded that the question before them was whether Mr. Prothero, in issuing a volume, at three and six net, with the title of "Transparences," and the sub-title of "Poems," was or was not seeking to obtain money under false pretenses. And judgment in Prothero's case was given thus: Any writer who wilfully and deliberately takes for his subject a heap of theoretical, transcendental stuff, stuff that at its best is pure hypothesis, and at its worst an outrage on the sane intel-

ligence of his readers, stuff, mind you, utterly lacking in simplicity, sensuousness and passion, that writer may be a thinker, a mystic, a metaphysician of unspeakable profundity, but he is not a poet. He stands condemned in the interests of Reality.

Laura knew it didn't matter what they said about him, but that last touch kindled her to flame. It even drew fire from Owen.

"If I gave them the reality they want," he cried; "If I brought them the dead body of God with the grave-clothes and worms about it, they'd call that poetry. I bring them the living body of God rejoicing in life, and they howl at me. What their own poets, their Wordsworths and Tennysons and Brownings showed them in fits and flashes, I show them in one continuous ecstasy, and they can't stand it. They might complain, the beggars, if I'd given them a dramatic trilogy or an epic. But when I've let them off, Laura, with a few songs!"

They were alone in his big room. Nina and Tanqueray and Jane had come and praised him, and Laura had been very entertaining over Prothero's reviews. But, when they had gone, she came and crouched on the floor beside him, as her way was, and leaned her face against his hand. Prothero, with the hand that was not engaged with Laura, turned over the pages of his poems. He was counting them, to prove the slenderness of his offence.

"Listen to this," he said. "They can't say it's *not* a song."

He read and she listened, while her hand clutched his, as if she held him against the onslaught of the world.

Her grip slackened as she surrendered to his voice. She lay back, as it were, and was carried on the strong wave of the rhythm. It was the questing song of the soul, the huntress, on the heavenly track; the song of the soul, the fowler, who draws after her the streaming worlds, as a net, to snare the wings of God. It was the song of her outcasting, of the fall from heaven that came of the too great rapture of the soul, of her wantoning in the joy of the supernal, who forgot God in possessing him. It was the song of birth, of the soul's plunging into darkness

and fire, of the weaving round her of the fleshy veils, the veils of separation, the veils of illusion; the song of her withdrawal into her dim house, of her binding and scourging, and of her ceaseless breaking on the wheel of time, till she renews her passion and the desire of her return. It was the song of the angels of mortal life, sounding its secrets; angels of terror and pain, carding the mortal stuff, spinning it out, finer and yet more fine, till every nerve becomes vibrant, a singing lyre of God; angels of the passions and the agonies, moving in the blood, ministers of the flame that subtilizes flesh to a transparent vehicle of God; strong angels of disease and dissolution, undermining, pulling down the house of pain.

He paused and she raised her head.

"Owen — that's what you once tried to make me see. Do you remember?"

"Yes, and you said that I was intoxicated and that it was all very dim and disagreeable and sad."

"I did n't understand it then," she said.

"You don't understand it now. You feel it."

"Why did n't I feel it then? When you said it?"

"I did n't say it. How could I? There's no other way of saying it but this. It isn't a theory or a creed; if it were it could be stated in a thousand different ways. It's the supreme personal experience, and this is the only form in which it could possibly be conveyed. These words were brought together from all eternity to say this thing."

"I'm not sure that I'm convinced of the truth of it, even now. I only feel the passion of it. It's the passion of it, Owen, that'll make it live."

"The truth and the passion of it are the same thing," he said.

He went on chanting. The music gathered and rose and broke over her in the last verse, in the song of consummation, of the soul's passion, jubilant, transcendent, where, of the veils of earth and heaven, the veils of separation and illusion, she weaves the veil of the last bridal, the fine veil of immortality.

In the silence Laura stirred at his side. She had possessed herself of his hand again and held it firmly, as if she were afraid that he might be taken from her in his ecstasy.

She was thinking: He used that theme before, in the first poem of his I ever heard. He was mistaken. There was more than one way of saying the same thing. She reminded him of this earlier poem. Surely, she said, it was the same thing, the same vision, the same ecstasy, or, if he liked, the same experience?

He did not answer all at once; he seemed to be considering her objection, as if he owned that it might have weight.

No, he said presently, it was not the same thing. Each experience was solitary, unique, it had its own incommunicable quality. He rose and found the earlier poem, and brought it to her that she might see the difference.

She shook her head; but she had to own that the difference was immense. It was the difference (so she made it out) between a vision that you were sure of, and a vision of which you were not so sure. And — yes — it was more than that; it was as if his genius had suffered incarnation, and its flame were intenser for having passed through flesh and blood. It was the incorruptible spirit that cried aloud; but there was no shrill tenuity in its cry. The thrill it gave her was unlike the shock that she remembered receiving from the poem of his youth, the shiver they had all felt, as at the passing by of the supersensual. Her husband's genius commanded all the splendours, all the tumultuous energies of sense. His verse rose, and its wings shed the colours of flame, blue, purple, red, and gold that kindled into white; it dropped and ran, striking earth with untiring, impetuous feet, it slackened; and still it throbbed with the heat of a heart driving vehement blood. But, she insisted, it was the same vision. How could she forget it? Did he suppose that she had forgotten the moment, four years ago, when Tanqueray had read the poem to them, and it had flashed on her — ?

"Oh yes," he said; "it flashed all right. It flashed on me. But it did no more. There was always the fear of losing it. The difference is that — now — there is n't any fear."

She said, "Ah, I remember how afraid you were."

"I was afraid," he said, "of you."

She rose and lifted her arms to him and laid her hand on his shoulders. He had to stoop to let her do it. So held, he could n't hope to escape from her candid, searching eyes.

"You are n't afraid of me now? I have n't made it go? You have n't lost it through me?"

"You've made it stay."

"Have I? Have I done that for you?"

He drew in his breath with a sob of passion. "Ah — the things you do!"

"None of them matter except that," she said.

She left him with that, turning on the threshold to add, "Why bother, then, about the other stupid things?"

It was as if she had said to him that since he owed that to her, a debt so unique, so enormous that he could never dream of paying it back in one lifetime, was n't it rather absurd and rather mean of him to make a fuss about the rest? How could he think of anything but that? Did n't the one stupendous obligation cover everything, and lay him, everlastingly abject, at her feet? The only graceful act left him was to kneel down and kiss her feet. And that was what, in spirit, he was always doing. As for her, she would consider herself paid if she saw the difference and knew that she had made it.

It was only now, in the hour of achievement, that, looking back and counting all his flashes and his failures, he realized the difference she had made. It had seemed to him once that he held his gift, his vision, on a fragile and uncertain tenure, that it could not be carried through the tumult and shock of the world without great danger and difficulty. The thing, as he had said, was tricky; it came and went; and the fear of losing it was the most overpowering of all fears.

He now perceived that, from the beginning, the thing that had been most hostile, most dangerous to his vision was this fear. Time after time it had escaped him when he had hung on to it too hard, and time after time it had returned when he had let it go, to follow the thundering batteries of the world. He had

not really lost it when he had left off clutching at it or had flung himself with it into the heart of the danger. He could not say that he had seen it in the reeking wards, and fields bloody with battle, or when his hands were at their swift and delicate work on the bodies of the wounded. But it had the trick of coming back to him in moments when he least looked for it. He saw now that its brief vanishings had been followed by brief and faint appearances, and that when it had left him longest it had returned to stay. The times of utter destitution were succeeded by perfect and continuous possession. He saw that nothing had been fatal to it except his fear.

He had tested it because of his fear. He had chosen his profession as the extreme test, because of his fear. He had given up his profession, again because of his fear, fear of success in it, fear of the world's way of rewarding heroism, the dreadful fear of promotion, of being caught and branded and tied down. He had thought that to be forced into a line, to be committed to medicine and surgery, was to burn the ships of God, to cut himself off for ever from his vision.

Looking back, he saw that his fear of the world had been nothing to his fear of women, of the half-spiritual, half-sensual snare. He had put away this fear, and stood the ultimate test. He had tied himself to a woman and bowed his neck for her to cling to. He would have judged this attitude perilous in the extreme, incompatible with vision, with seeing anything but two diminutive feet and the inches of earth they stood in. And it was only since he had done this dangerous thing and done it thoroughly, only since he had staked his soul to redeem his body, that his vision had become secure. It really stayed. He could turn from it, but it was always with him; he could hold and command it at his will.

She was right. If he could take that from her, if he was in for it to that extent, why *did* he bother about the other stupid things?

And yet he bothered. All that autumn he worked harder than ever at his journalism. He seemed to gather to himself all the jobs that were going on the "Morning Telegraph." He went

the round of the theatres on first nights, reporting for the "Morning Telegraph" on plays that were beneath the notice of its official dramatic critic. He reviewed poetry and *belles lettres* for the "Morning Telegraph;" and he did a great deal of work for it down in Fleet Street with a paste-pot and a pair of scissors.

Prothero's genius had liberated itself for the time being in his last poem; it was detached from him; it wandered free, like a blessed spirit invisible, while Prothero's brain agonized and journalized as Laura said. There was no compromise this time, no propitiation, no playing with the beautiful prose of his occasional essays. He plunged from his heavenly height sheer into the worst blackness of the pit; he contorted himself there in his obscure creation of paragraphs and columns. His spirit writhed like a fine flame, trammelled and tortured by the grossness of the stuff it kindled, and the more it writhed the more he piled on the paragraphs and columns. He seemed, Laura said, to take a pleasure in seeing how much he could pile on without extinguishing it.

In December he caught cold coming out of a theatre on a night of north wind and sleet, and he was laid up for three weeks with bronchitis.

And at night, that winter, when sounds of coughing came from the Consumption Hospital, they were answered through the open windows of the house with the iron gate. And Laura at Owen's side lay awake in her fear.

LVIII

THERE was one thing that Prothero, in his journalism, drew the line at. He would not, if they paid him more than they had ever paid him, more than they had ever dreamed of paying anybody, he would not review another poet's work. For some day, he said, Nicky will bring out a volume of his poems, and in that day he will infallibly turn to me. If, in that day, I can lay my hand upon my heart and swear that I never review poetry, that I never have reviewed it and never shall, I can look Nicky in his innocent face with a clean soul.

But when Nicky actually did it (in the spring of nineteen-nine) Prothero applied to Brodrick for a holiday. He wanted badly to get out of town. He could not — when it came to the agonizing point — he could not face Nicky.

At least that was the account of the matter which Tanqueray gave to Brodrick when the question of Prothero's impossibility came up again at Moor Grange. Brodrick was indignant at Prothero's wanting a holiday, and a month's holiday. It was preposterous. But Jane had implored him to let him have it.

Jinny would give a good deal, Tanqueray imagined, to get out of town too. It was more terrible for her to face Nicky than for any of them. Tanqueray himself was hiding from him at that moment in Brodrick's study. But Jinny, with that superb and incomprehensible courage that women have, was facing him down there in the drawing-room.

It was in the drawing-room, later on in the afternoon, that Brodrick found his wife, shrunk into a corner of the sofa and mopping her face with a pocket-handkerchief. Tanqueray had one knee on the sofa and one arm flung tenderly round Jinny's shoulder. He met, smiling, the husband's standstill of imperturbable inquiry.

"It's all right, Brodrick," he said. "I've revived her. I've been talking to her like a father."

He stood looking down at her, and commented —

"Nicky brought a book of poems out and Jinny cried."

"It was th — th — the last straw," sobbed Jinny.

Brodrick left them together, just to show how imperturbable he was.

"George," she said, "it was horrible. Poor Nicky stood there where you are, waiting for me to say things. And I could n't, I could n't, and he saw it. He saw it and turned white ——"

"He *is* white," said Tanqueray.

"He turned whiter. And he burst out into a dreadful perspiration. And then — oh, don't laugh — it was so awful — he took my hand and wrung it, and walked out of the room, very dignified and stiff."

"My dear child, he only thought you were speechless with emotion."

But Jane was putting on her hat and coat which lay beside her.

"Let's get out somewhere," she said, "anywhere away from this intolerable scene. Let's tear over the Heath."

She tore and he followed. Gertrude saw them go.

She turned midway between Putney and Wimbledon. "Oh, how my heart aches for that poor lamb."

"It need n't. The poor lamb's heart does n't ache for itself."

"It does. I stabbed it."

"Not you!"

"But, George — they were dedicated to me. Could my cup of agony be fuller?"

"I admit it's full."

"And how about Nicky's?"

"Look here, Jinny. If you or I or Prothero had written those poems we should be drinking cups of agony. But there is *no* cup of agony for Nicky. He believes that those poems are immortal, and that none of us can rob them of their immortality."

"But if he's slaughtered — and he will be — if they fall on him and tear him limb from limb, poor innocent lamb!"

"He is n't innocent, your lamb. He deserves it. So he won't get it. It's only poets like Prothero who are torn limb from limb."

"I don't know. There are people who'd stick a knife into him as soon as look at him."

"If there are he'll be happy. He'll believe that there's a plot against him to write him down. He'll believe that he's Keats. He'll believe anything. You need n't be sorry for him. If only you or I had Nicky's hope of immortality — if we only had the joy he has even now, in the horrible act of creation. Why, he's never tired. He can go on for ever without turning a hair, whereas look at *our* hair after a morning's work. Think what it must be to feel that you never can be uninspired, never to have a doubt or a shadowy misgiving. Neither you nor I nor Prothero will ever know a hundredth part of the rapture Nicky knows. We get it for five minutes, an hour, perhaps, and all the rest is simply hard, heavy, heartbreaking, grinding labour."

Their wild pace slackened.

"It's a dog's life, yours and mine, Jinny. Upon my soul, for mere sensation, if I could choose I'd rather be Nicky."

He paused.

"And then — when you think of his supreme illusion ——"

"Has he another?"

"You know he has. If all of us could believe that when the woman we love refuses us she only does it because of her career ——"

"If he *did* believe that ——"

"Believe it? He believes now that she did n't even refuse him. He thinks he renounced her — for the sake of her career. It's quite possible he thinks she loves him; and really, considering her absurd behaviour ——"

"Oh, I don't mind," she moaned, "he can believe anything he likes if it makes him happier."

"He *is* happy," said George tempestuously. "If I were to be born again, I'd pray to the high gods, the cruel gods, Jinny, to make me mad — like Nicky — to give me the gift of inde-

structible illusion. Then, perhaps, I might know what it was to live."

She had seen him once, and only once, in this mood, the night he had dined with her in Kensington Square six weeks before he married Rose.

"But you and I have been faithful to reality — true, as they say, to life. If the idiots who fling that phrase about only knew what it meant! You've been more faithful than I. You've taken such awful risks. You fling your heart down, Jinny, every time."

"Do you never take risks? Do you never fling your heart down?"

He looked at her. "Not your way. Not unless I *know* that I'll get what I want."

"And haven't you got it?"

"I've got most of it, but not all — yet."

His tone might or might not imply that getting it was only a question of time.

"I say, where are you going?"

She was heading rapidly for Augustus Road. She wanted to get away from George.

"Not there," he protested, perceiving her intention.

"I must."

He followed her down the long road where the trees drooped darkly, and he stood with her by the gate.

"How long will you be?" he said.

"I can't say. Half-an-hour — three-quarters — ever so long."

He waited for an hour, walking up and down, up and down the long road under the trees. She reappeared as he was turning at the far end of it. He had to run to overtake her.

Her face had on it the agony of unborn tears.

"What is it, Jinny?" he said.

"Mabel Brodrick."

She hardly saw his gesture of exasperation.

"Oh, George, she suffers. It's terrible. There's to be an operation — to-morrow. I can think of nothing else."

"Oh, Jinny, is there no one to take care of you? Is there no one to keep you from that woman?"

"Oh don't — if you had seen her ——"

"I don't want to see her. I don't want *you* to see her. You should never have anything to do with suffering. It hurts you. It kills you. You ought to be taken care of. You ought to be kept from the sight and sound of it." He gazed wildly round the Heath. "If Brodrick was any good he'd take you out of this damned place."

"I would n't go. Poor darling, she can't bear me out of her sight. I believe I've worn a path going and coming."

They had left the beaten path. Their way lay in a line drawn straight across the Heath from Brodrick's house. It was almost as if her feet had made it.

"Jinny's path," he said.

They were silent, and he gathered up, at it were, the burden of their silence when he stopped and faced her with his question —

"How are you going on?"

LIX

A YEAR passed and half a year, and she had not found an answer to Tanqueray's question.

She had gone on somehow. He himself had made it easier for her by his frequent disappearances. He had found a place somewhere on Dartmoor where he hid himself from the destroyers, from the dreadful little people, where he hid himself from Rose. It helped her — not to have the question raised.

Now (they were in August of nineteen-ten) Tanqueray was back again with his question. He had left her, about eleven o'clock in the evening, in her study, facing it. Not but that he had provided her with a solution, a positive solution. "Jinny," he had said, "why don't you do as I do? Why don't you go away, if it was only for a few months every year?"

It seemed so simple, Tanqueray's solution, that at first she wondered why it had not occurred to her before. But as she looked back over the last three years she saw why. It could not have occurred to her as long as she had had the charge of her own children. She would not be entertaining it now if Gertrude were not there, looking after them. And it would not have been possible if the baby, the little girl, her third child, had lived. She had wanted to have a little girl, just to show what she could do. She had said, "There shall be one happy woman in the world and she shall be my daughter."

But the little girl had never lived at all. She had been brought forth dead in the night that followed Mabel Brodrick's death. Jane had been with Mabel when she died. That was in January six months ago.

After that there had come the great collapse, the six weeks when she lay quiet and Gertrude, like an angel, waited on her. She had been allowed to have the little boys with her for hours at a time then, she being utterly unable to excite them. Some-

times, when she was not well enough to have them very long, Gertrude would bring them in to look at her, the little solemn-eyed, quiet boys, holding Gertrude's hands. Every day brought her a moment of pain when she saw them going out of the room with Gertrude, led by her hand.

For six weeks Brodrick had been left very much to Gertrude. And Gertrude's face in that time had flowered softly, as if she had entered herself into the peace she made.

But in March Jane was on her feet again. In April Brodrick took her to the Riviera, and her return (in May) was the return of that brilliant and distracting alien who had invaded Brodrick's house seven years ago. Jane having nothing to do but to recover had done it so completely that Henry admitted that he would not have known her. To which she had rather ominously replied that she knew herself, only too well.

Even before she went away, even lying quiet, she had been aware that life was having its triumphant will of her. She had known all along, of course, that (as Owen Prothero had told her) she was sound through and through. Her vitality was unconquerable. Nothing could wreck her. Even Henry would own that her body, when they gave it a chance, was as fine a physical envelope as any woman could wish to have. Lying quiet, she had been inclined to agree with Henry that genius — her genius at any rate — was a neurosis; and she was not going to be neurotic any more. Whatever it was, it had made things terribly complicated. And to Jane lying quiet they had become absurdly simple. She herself was simplified. She had been torn in pieces; and in putting herself together again she had left out the dangerous, disintegrating, virile element. Whatever happened now, she would no longer suffer from the presence in her of two sexes contending for the mastery. Through it all, through all her dreadful virility, she had always been persistently and preposterously feminine. And lying quiet she was more than ever what George Tanqueray had said she was not to be — a mere woman.

Therefore to Jane, lying quiet, there had been no question of how she was to go on.

But to Jane on her feet again, in all her ungovernable, disastrous energy, the question was as insistent as Tanqueray himself. Her genius had recognized its own vehicle in her body restored to perfect health, and three years' repression had given it ten times its powers to dominate and torture. It had thriven on the very tragedies that had brought her low.

It knew its hour and claimed her. She was close upon thirty-nine. It would probably claim her without remission for the next seven years. It had been relentless enough in its youth; it would be terrible in its maturity. The struggle, if she struggled, would tear her as she had never yet been torn. She would have to surrender, or at any rate to make terms with it. It was useless to fall back upon the old compromises and adjustments. Tanqueray's solution was the only possible, the only tolerable one. But it depended perilously upon Hugh's consent.

She went to him in his study where he sat peaceably smoking in the half-hour before bed-time.

Brodrick merely raised his eyebrows as she laid it before him — her monstrous proposal to go away — for three months. He asked her if three months was not rather a long time for a woman to leave her home and her children?

"I know," she said, "but if I don't ——"

"Well?"

"I shall go to pieces."

He looked at her critically, incredulously.

"Why can't you say at once what's wrong?" he said. "Is there anything you want that you don't have here? Is there any mortal thing that can be done that is n't done?"

"Not any mortal thing."

"What is it then?"

"Hugh, dear, did it never strike you that you are a very large family? And that when it comes down on me it's in the proportion of about seven to one?"

"Whoever *does* come down on you?"

"John," said she, "was with me for two hours yesterday."

Brodrick lent his ear as to a very genuine grievance. John, since his bereavement, was hardly ever out of the house.

"And I suppose," he said, "he bored you?"

"No, but he will call when I'm writing."

"Why on earth don't you send him away?"

"I would, if Mabel had n't died. But how can you when he's unhappy? It would hurt him so. And yet, supposing you were to die, what would John say if I were to call on him at the works every day, and play with his dynamos to distract my mind, or sit with him in his office rumpling his hair, and dislocating his ideas till he did n't know the difference between a steam-roller and an internal combustion engine? That's more or less what John does to me. The only thing is to get away."

However, it was for Brodrick to decide, she said. And Brodrick said he could n't decide until he had thought it over.

She was very soon aware that she had caused a scandal in her husband's family by her proposal to go away for three months. The scandal was not altogether unconnected with George Tanqueray, since it was at his suggestion that she proposed to take this unprecedented step. If she had proposed to take it with him they could hardly have shown themselves more horrified.

She knew how monstrous her conduct must appear to them. She could see it all so clearly from their point of view. That had always been after all her poor merit, that she could see things from other people's point of view. Her vision indeed of them, of the way they took things, was apt to be so vivid, so engrossing that it left her with no point of view of her own. She carried into life itself and all its relations her virtue as an artist, that effacement of her observing self in favour of the thing observed.

That, Nina told her, was her danger. Nina happened to be with her on the day when another family committee met and sat upon her case. They were sitting on it now, up-stairs with Brodrick in his study. She knew infallibly what their judgment would be. Just as she had seemed to them so long a creature of uncertain health, she must seem now inconstant, insincere, the incarnation of heartlessness, egotism and caprice. She said to herself that it was all very well for Nina to talk. This insight was a curse. It was terrible to know what people

were thinking, to feel what they were feeling. And they were seven to one, so that when she gave them pain she had to feel seven times the pain she gave.

But after all they, her judges, could take care of themselves. This family, that was one consolidated affection, was like a wall, it would shelter and protect her so long as she was content to be sheltered and protected; if she dashed herself against it it would break her in pieces.

And Nina was saying, "Can't you take it into your own hands? Why should you let these people decide your fate for you?"

"Hugh will decide it," she said. "He's with them up-stairs now."

"Is he asking their advice?"

"No, they're giving it him. That's my chance, Nina."

"Your chance?"

"My one chance. They'll put his back up and, if it's only to show them, he'll let me go."

"Do you mean to say, Jinny, that if he did n't you would n't go?"

"I don't even know that I'd go if he minded very much."

"I wish to goodness George Tanqueray was here. He might make you ——"

"What has he ever made me do?"

"He might make you see it."

"I do see it," said Jane.

She closed her eyes as one tired with much seeing. Nina's presence hardly helped her. Nina was even more profoundly disturbing than George Tanqueray; she had even less of consolation to offer to one torn and divided, she herself being so supreme an instance of the glory of the single flame.

The beauty and the wonder of it — in Nina — was its purity. Nina showed to what a pitch it had brought her, the high, undivided passion of her genius. Under it every trace of Nina's murkiness had vanished. She had lost that look of restless, haggard adolescence, that horrible intentness, as if her hand was always on the throat of her wild beast. You saw, of course, that

she had suffered; but you saw too that her genius was appeased by her suffering. It was just, it was compassionate; it had rewarded her for every pang.

Jane found herself saying beautiful things about Nina's genius. It was the flame, unmistakably the pure flame. If solitude, if virginity, if frustration could do that—— She knew what it had cost Nina, but it was worth it, seeing what she had gained.

Nina faced her with the eyes that had grown so curiously quiet.

"Ah, Jinny," she said, "could *you* have borne to pay my price?"

She owned that she could not.

Up-stairs Brodrick faced his family where it sat in judgment upon Jane.

"What does she complain of?" said John.

"Interruption," said Hugh. "She says she never has any time to herself, with people constantly running in and out."

"She does n't mind," said Sophy, "how much time she gives to the Protheros and the rest of them. Nina Lempriere's with her now. She's been here three solid hours. As for George Tanqueray——"

John shook his head.

"That's what I don't like, Hugh, Tanqueray's hanging about the house at all hours of the day and night. However you look at it, it's a most undesirable thing."

"Oh——Tanqueray," said Brodrick, "*he's* all right."

"He's anything but all right," said Henry. "A fellow who notoriously neglects his wife."

"Well," said Brodrick, "I don't neglect mine."

"If you give her her head," said Henry.

He scowled at Henry.

"You know, Hugh," said Frances, "she really will be talked about."

"She's being talked about now," said Brodrick, "and I don't like it."

"There's no use talking," said John sorrowfully, and he rose to go.

They all rose then. Two by two they went across the Heath to John's house, Sophy with Henry and Frances with John; and as they went they leaned to each other, talking continuously about Hugh, and Tanqueray, and Jane.

"If Hugh gives in to her in this," said Henry, "he'll always have to give in."

"I could understand it," said Sophy, "if she had too much to do in the house."

"It's not," said Frances, "as if there was any struggle to make ends meet. She has everything she wants."

"Children ——" said John.

"It's preposterous," said Henry.

When Nina had gone Brodrick came to Jane.

"Well," he said, "do you still want to go away for three months?"

"It's not that I want to, but I must."

"If you must," he said, "of course you may. I dare say it will be a very good thing for you."

"Shall you mind, Hugh?"

"Oh dear me, no. I shall be very comfortable here with Gertrude."

"And Gertrude," she murmured, "will be very comfortable here with you."

That evening, about nine o'clock, the parlourmaid announced to Brodrick in his study that Miss Winny and Mr. Eddy had called. They were in the dining-room. When Brodrick asked if Mrs. Brodrick was with them he was told that the young gentlemen had said expressly that it was Mr. Brodrick whom they wished to see.

Brodrick desired that they should be brought to him. They were going away, to stay somewhere with a school-fellow of Winny's, and he supposed that they had looked in to say good-bye.

As they entered something told him, as he had not been told before, that his young niece and nephew had grown up. It was not Winny's ripening form and trailing gown, it was not the golden down on Eddy's upper lip; it was not altogether that the

outline of their faces had lost the engaging and tender indecision of its youth. It was their unmistakable air of inward assurance and maturity.

After the usual greetings (Brodrick was aware of a growing restraint in this particular) Eddy, at the first opening, made for his point — *their* point, rather. His uncle had inquired with urbane irony at what hour the family was to be bereaved of their society, and how long it would have to languish —

They were going, Eddy said, at ten in the morning, and a jolly good thing too. They weren't coming back, either, any sooner than they could help. They — well, they couldn't "stick it" at home just now.

They'd had (Winny interpolated) a row with Uncle Henry, a gorgeous row (the colour of it was in Winny's face).

Brodrick showed no sign of surprise, not so much as a raised eyebrow. He asked in quiet tones what it was all about?

Eddy, standing up before his uncle and looking very tall and manly, gazed down his waistcoat at his boots.

"It was about Jin-Jin," Winny said.

(Eddy could almost have sworn that his uncle suffered a slight shock.)

"We can't stick it, you know, the way they're going on about her. The fact is," said the tall youth, "we told Uncle Henry that, and he did n't like it."

"You did, did you?"

"Yes. I know you'll say it is n't our business, but you see —"

"You see" (Winny explained), "we're so awfully fond of her."

Brodrick knew that he ought to tell the young rascals that their being fond of her did n't make it any more their business. But he could n't.

"What did you say to your Uncle Henry?"

He really wanted to know.

"Oh, we said it was all humbug about Jinny being neurotic. He's neurotic himself and so he thinks everybody else is. He's got it regularly on the brain."

(If, Brodrick thought, Henry could have heard him!)

"You can't think," said Winny, "how he bores us with it."

"I said he could n't wonder if she *was* neurotic, when you think what she's got to stand. The boresomeness——" He left the idea to its own immensity.

"Of what?" said Brodrick.

"Well, for one thing, you know, of living everlastingly with Gertrude."

Brodrick said, "Gertrude does n't bore anybody."

"She does n't bore *you*, Uncle Hugh, of course, because you're a man."

(Winny said that.)

"Then," said Eddy, "there's *us*. You know, we're an awful family for a woman like Jinny to have married into. There isn't one of us fit to black her boots. And I believe Uncle Henry thinks she was n't made for anything except to bring more of us into the world."

Brodrick's face displayed a fine flush.

"*You're* all right, Uncle Hugh."

Brodrick lowered his eyelids in modest acceptance of this tribute.

"I keep forgetting you're one of them, because you married her."

"What else did you say to him?"

Eddy became excited. "Oh — I got in one before we left — I landed him neatly. I asked him why on earth — if he thought she was neurotic — he let her shut herself up for a whole year with that screaming kid, when any fat nurse would have done the job as well? And why he let her break her neck, running round after Aunt Mabel? I had him there."

"What did your Uncle say to that?" (Brodrick's voice was rather faint.)

"He did n't say anything. He could n't — oh — well, he *did* say my impertinence was unendurable. And I said *his* was, when you think what Jinny is."

He meditated on it. He had become, suddenly, a grave and reverent youth.

"We really came," Winny said, "to know whether Jinny is going away?"

"She is going away," said Brodrick, "for three months."

He rose and held out the hand of parting. To his surprise Winny kissed him and kept her face against his as she whispered, "And *if* — she has to stay a year?"

"She shall stay," Brodrick said.

LX

SHE went down to Devonshire, to a farm-house not far from Chagford, on the edge of Dartmoor. Tanqueray had rooms there which were his and nobody else's, and he had lent them to her for three months, or for as long as she cared to stay. She would be safe there, he said. Nobody would find her.

Certainly it would be hard to find her, so remote and hidden was the place. The farm, which was small and humble, stood in a deep lane cut off from Chagford by a hill. The lane dipped abruptly from the hillside; it plunged; it went down, at noon, as into a pit of darkness. The white-washed house, lodged on a flat break in the descent, sucked light through its high ring of ash-trees. Below it the lane went headlong to the hill-bottom. It was perched on a hill, hugged in a valley, according as you approached it from the north-east or the south-west.

The doorway was guarded by a deep, white-walled porch. You came straight into an ancient low-roofed, white-washed kitchen, now the living-room for the eccentric stranger who had made his lodging there. A stairway led up from it into the bedroom overhead. This living-room had a door that opened into a passage joining it to further and dimmer parts of the house; but the bedroom was inaccessible save by its own stair.

By the deep-set window of each room there stood a firm, solid oak table, at which, the woman of the farm had told her, Mr. Tanqueray wrote. Both windows looked on to the lane. That was the beauty of it, Tanqueray had said. There would be nothing to distract her. You couldn't trust Jinny on the open moor.

For the first week Jinny, cut off from her husband and children, was assailed by a poignant and perpetual misery. As one who has undergone a surgical operation, she suffered an in-

veterate nerve-aching after the severed flesh. She was haunted by Brodrick's face as she had seen it from her corner of the railway carriage, looking in at her through the window, silent and overcast, and by his look, his unforgettable look as the train carried her away. And the children, their faces and their soft forms and their voices haunted her. She did no work that week.

Then the country claimed her. Dartmoor laid on her its magic of wild earth and wild skies. She tried to write and could not. Something older and more powerful than her genius had her. She suffered a resurgence of her youth, her young youth that sprang from the moors, and had had its joy in them and knew its joy again. It was on the moors that earth had most kinship and communion with the sky. It took the storms of heaven. Its hills were fused with heaven in fires of sunset; they wore the likeness of the clouds, of vapour and fine air. On the moors it was an endless passing of substance into shadow and of shadow into substance.

And she had her own kinship and communion with them. She remembered these hillsides grey as time, where the grass was a perishing bloom on the face of the immemorial granite. A million memories and instincts met in these smells of furze and heather and moss, of green rushes and the sweet earth of the south-west.

Tanqueray was right. She was not to be trusted on the open moors. She was out of doors all day. And out of doors the Idea that had driven her forth withdrew itself. Its very skirts, only half-discerned, were beyond her grasp. She was oppressed at times by a sense of utter frustration and futility. If this was all; if she was simply there enjoying herself, tramping the hills all day, a glorious animal set free; if she was not going to accomplish anything, then she had no business to be there at all. It would be better to give it up, to give in, to go back again.

There was a day in her third week when she nearly did go back, when it seemed to her that she would be obeying a wise instinct if she went. She got as far as looking up the trains to Waterloo.

Then, on the brink of it, something that announced itself

as a wiser and profounder instinct, an instinct of self-preservation, told her not to go. It told her to wait, to trust to Nature's way, and to Nature's wisdom in bringing back her youth. Nature's way was to weave over again the web of life so strained and worn, so tangled and broken by the impact of other lives. Nature's wisdom was to make her simple and strong, a new creature, with a clean vision and an imagination once more virgin to the world. In short, Nature's beneficent intention was to restore her whole to the genius which also had been a part of Nature's plan.

And all the time good news of Brodrick and the children reached her every other day. Punctually, every other day Gertrude Collett wrote, assuring her that all was going well at home and urging her to stay. Brodrick wrote (at rather longer intervals) saying how happy the children were, and how entirely comfortable he was with Gertrude. His letters contained little besides praise of Gertrude. There was no reason, he reiterated, why she should not stay.

She stayed, and in her fifth week she received the reward of her staying. Walking back to the farm late one evening, the moors veiled from her passion by the half-darkness, her Idea came back to her. It came, not yet with the vividness of flesh and blood, but like a ghost. It had ghostly hands and feet, and like a ghost it walked the road with her. But through its presence she felt in herself again that nascent ecstasy which foretold, infallibly, the onset of the incredible act and labour of creation.

When she reached the farm she found George Tanqueray sitting in the porch. The lamp-light through the open door revealed him.

"Whatever brought you here?" she said.

"What always brings me."

She understood him to mean that he also had been driven forth, and was in subjection to the Idea.

"Have you come to turn me out?" she said.

"No, Jinny."

He explained that he was staying in the village, at the Three Crowns. He had arrived that evening and had walked over.

He followed her into the deep kitchen. At the supper-table his place had been laid for him already. He had ordered it so.

He looked at her, smiling an apology.

"Is it all right?" he said.

"Perfectly all right, George."

They talked all evening and far into the night. She parted from him at the gate of the lane under the ash-trees. Under the ash-trees her Idea showed in its immense and luminous perfection. It trembled into life. It drew her, palpitating, into the lamp-light of the room.

She had found what she had come for.

That was the effect he always had on her.

LXI

BRODRICK had been alone in the first fortnight that followed Jane's extraordinary departure. Instead of settling down to be comfortable with Gertrude, he had packed her off to the seaside with the children and their nurse. He had often wondered what he should do without Gertrude. Now he knew. He knew by incontrovertible experiment that he could not do without her at all. Everything, even the silver-chiming clock, went wrong in her absence.

If, before that fortnight, Brodrick had been asked suddenly with what feelings he regarded Gertrude Collett, he would have replied that he was unaware of regarding the lady with any feelings, or indeed of regarding her intimately at all. And he would have told the simple truth; for Brodrick was of all men the most profoundly unaware.

Of course, there was gratitude. He had always been aware of that. But in that fortnight his gratitude took on immense proportions, it became a monstrous and indestructible indebtedness. He would have said that such a feeling, so far from making him comfortable with Gertrude, would have made him very uncomfortable, much more uncomfortable than he cared to be. But curiously it was not so. In his renewed intercourse with Gertrude he found a vague, exquisite satisfaction. The idea of not paying Gertrude back in any way would have been intolerable; but what he felt now was so very like affection that it counted as in some measure a return. It was as if he had settled it in his own mind that he could now meet the innocent demands which the angelic woman seemed to make. Goodness knew it was n't much to ask, a little attention, a little display of the feeling so very like affection, after all that she had done.

It pleased him now when he came, mooning drearily, into the drawing-room, to find Gertrude in possession. He was almost

always tired now, and he was glad to lie back in an easy-chair and have his tea handed to him by Gertrude. He looked forward, in fancy, to the children's hour that followed tea-time, and he had made a great point at first of having them to himself. But as a matter of fact, being almost always tired, he enjoyed their society far more sincerely when Gertrude was there to keep them in order.

That was her gift. She had been the genius of order ever since she had come into his house—good gracious, was it ten years ago? Her gift made her the most admirable secretary an editor could have. But she was more than that now. She was a perfect companion to a physically fatigued and intellectually slightly deteriorated man. He owned to the deterioration. Jane had once told him that his intellect was a “lazy, powerful beast.” It seemed to him now, humbly regarding it, that the beast was and always had been much more lazy than powerful. It required constant stimulus to keep it going. His young ambition and his young passion for Jane Holland had converged to whip it up. It flagged with the dying down of passion and ambition. Things latterly had come a bit too late. His dream had been realized too late. And he had n't realized it, either. Jane had realized it for him. No sooner had he got his wonderful magazine into his own hands than he found out how little he cared about it. He had become more and more absorbed in its external and financial aspects. He showed more and more as the man of business, the slightly hustled and harassed father of a family. He had put off intellectual things. His deterioration weighed on him when he thought of Jane. But Gertrude's gentleness stood between him and any acute perception of his state.

Sometimes when they sat together over her fire, lit in the September evenings, there would be long silences. Gertrude never broke a silence. She was conscious of it; she, as it were, held it—he could almost feel her holding it—tenderly, as if she loved it; she handled it gently as if she were afraid that it would break. She gave him so much sense of her presence and

no more. She kept before him, humbly, veiled from his vision, the fact that she was there to serve him.

Sometimes a curious shyness would come on her. It was not the poignant shyness of her youth which Brodrick had once found so distressing. It conveyed no fear and no embarrassment, only (so he made it out) the quietest, subtlest hint of possible flight. Its physical sign was the pale, suffused flame in Gertrude's face, and that web of air across her eyes. There was a sort of charm about it.

Sometimes, coming upon Gertrude alone and unaware of him, he would find her sad. He said to himself then that she had no great cause for gaiety. It was a pretty heavy burden for her, this shouldering of another woman's responsibilities. He thought that Jane had sometimes been a little hard on her. He supposed that was her (Jane's) feminine way. The question was whether he himself might not have been kinder; whether there was n't anything that he might yet do to make life sweeter to her. He was, in fact, profoundly sorry for Gertrude, more profoundly sorry than he had been ten years ago, when she had come to him, and he had kept her, though he did n't want her, because he was sorry for her. Well, he wanted her enough now in all conscience.

Then the horrible thought would occur to him: supposing Gertrude were to go? It was not conceivable, her going.

For, above all her gifts, Gertrude was an incomparable mother to those unfortunate children (since Jane's departure Brodrick had begun to think definitely of his children as unfortunate). It was distinctly pleasurable the feeling with which he watched her ways in gathering them to her side and leading them softly from the room when "Daddy was busy," or when "poor Daddy was so tired." More than once he found himself looking out of his study window at her quiet play with the little boys in the garden. Solemn little boys they were; and sometimes he wondered whether little Jacky were not *too* solemn, too preternaturally quiet for four and a half, and rather too fond of holding Gertrude's hand. He remembered how the little beggar

used to romp and laugh when Jinny — And remembering he would turn abruptly from the window with a sore heart and a set face.

Three weeks passed thus. There was a perceptible increase in Gertrude's shyness and sadness.

One evening after dinner she came to him in his study. He rose and drew forward a chair for her. She glanced at his writing-table and at the long proof-sheets that hung from it, streaming.

"I must n't," she said. "You're busy."

"Well — not so busy as all that. What is it?"

"I've been thinking that it would perhaps be better if I were to leave."

"To leave? What's put that into your head?"

She did not answer. She appeared to him dumb with distress.

"Have the children been too much for you?"

"Poor little darlings — no."

"Little monkeys. Send them to me if you can't manage them."

"It is n't that. It is — I don't think it's right for me to stay."

"Not *right*?"

"On the children's account, I mean."

He looked at her and a shade, a tremor, of uneasiness passed over his face.

"I say," he said, "you don't think they're unhappy?"

(She smiled.)

"— Without their mother?" He jerked it out with a visible effort.

"No. If they were I should n't be so uneasy."

"Come, you don't want them to be unhappy, do you?"

"No. I don't want anybody to be unhappy. That's why I think I'd better go."

"On their account?" he repeated, hopelessly adrift.

"Theirs, and their mother's."

"But it's on their account — and — their mother's — that we want you."

"I know; but it isn't fair to them or to — Mrs. Brodrick that they should be so dependent on me."

"But — they're babies."

"Not quite — now. It isn't right that I should be taking their mother's place, that they should look to me for everything."

"But," he broke in irritably, "they don't. Why should they?"

"They do. They must. You see, it's because I'm on the spot."

"I see." He hid his frowning forehead with one hand.

"I know," she continued, "it can't be helped. It isn't anybody's fault. It's — it's inevitable."

"Yes. For the present it's — inevitable."

They both paused on that word.

"I suppose," he said, "you're really afraid that they'll get too fond of you?"

"Yes."

"They're very fond of their mother, aren't they?"

"Yes — if she were always here."

"Of course, it does make your position a little difficult. Still, we don't want them to fret for her — we don't want them not to be fond of you. Besides, if you went, what on earth would they do without you?"

"They must learn to do without me. They would have some one else."

"Yes, and they'll be fond of *her*."

"Not in the same way. I think perhaps I've given myself too much to them. There's something unusual, something tragic in the way they cling to me. I know it's bad for them. I try to check it, and I can't. And I've no right to let it go on. Nobody has a right except their mother."

"Well, it's awfully nice of you to feel like that about it. But as you say, I don't see how it's to be helped. I think you're

taking an exaggerated view — conscientiously exaggerated. They're too young, you know, to be very tragic."

She smiled as through tears.

"I don't think you'll save tragedy by going. Besides, what should I do?"

"You?"

"Yes. You don't appear to have thought of me."

"Don't I?" She smiled again, as if at some secret, none too happy, of her own.

"If I had not thought of you I should never have come here a second time. If I had not thought of you I should not have thought of going."

"Did you think I wanted you to go?"

"I — was not quite sure."

He laughed. "Are you sure now?"

She looked at him again.

"I *do* help you by staying?"

He was overwhelmed by his indebtedness.

"Most certainly you do. I must have been very ungracious if you have n't realized how indispensable you are."

"If you're sure of that — I'll stay."

"Good."

He held out his hand and detained hers for a moment. "Are you sure you don't want to leave us? I'm not asking too much of you?"

She withdrew her hand.

"You have never asked too much."

Thus Gertrude uncovered the knees of the gods.

LXII

FOUR days in every week Jane had a letter from Gertrude and once a week a letter from Brodrick. She was thus continually assured that all was well and that Brodrick was very comfortable with Gertrude.

She was justified in staying on, since her genius had come back to her, divinely placable, divinely propitiated and appeased.

She knew that in a measure she owed this supreme reconciliation to George Tanqueray. Her genius was virile. He could not give it anything, nor could it have taken anything he gave. He was passive to her vision and humble, on his knees, as he always had been, before a kindred immortality. What he did for her was to see her idea as she saw it, but so that through his eyes she saw steadily and continuously its power and perfection. She was aware that in the last five years she had grown dependent on him for that. For five years he had lifted her out of the abyss when she had found herself falling. Through all the surgings and tossings that had beset her he had kept her from sinking into the trough of the wave. Never once had he let go his hold till he had seen her riding gaily on the luminous crest.

His presence filled her with a deep and strong excitement. For two years, in their long separations, she had found that her craving for it was at times unbearable. She knew that when her flame died down and she was in terror of extinction, she had only to send for him to have her fear taken from her. She had only to pick up a book of his, to read a sentence of his, and she would feel herself afire again. Everything about him, his voice, his look, the touch of his hand, had this penetrating, life-giving quality.

Three weeks passed and Tanqueray was still staying in his inn at Chagford. In the mornings they worked, he on his book and she on hers. She saw him every afternoon or evening. Sometimes they took long walks together over the moors. Sometimes they wandered in the deep lanes. Sometimes, in rainy weather, they sat indoors, talking. In the last five years Tanqueray (who never used to show his work) had brought all his manuscripts for her to read. He brought them now. Sometimes she read to him what she had written. Sometimes he read to her. Sometimes he left his manuscript with her and took hers away with him. They discussed every doubtful point together, they advised each other and consulted. Sometimes they talked of other things. She was aware that the flame he kindled leaned to him, drawn by his flame. She kept it high. She wanted him to see how divine it was, and how between him and her there could be no question of passion that was not incorruptible, a fiery intellectual thing.

But every day Tanqueray walked up from the village to the farm. She looked on his coming as the settled, natural thing. Brodrick continued to assure her that the children were happy without her, and that he was very comfortable with Gertrude; and Tanqueray reiterated that it was all right, all perfectly right.

One day he arrived earlier than usual, about eleven o'clock. He proposed that they should walk together over the moor to Post Bridge, lunch at the inn there and walk back. Distance was nothing to them.

They set out down the lane. There had been wind at dawn. Southwards, over the hills, the clouds were piled up to the high sun in a riot and glory of light and storm. The hills were dusk under their shadow.

The two swung up the long slopes at a steady pace, rejoicing in the strong movement of their limbs. It was thus that they used to set out together long ago, on their "days," over the hills of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. Jane remarked that her state now was almost equal to that great freedom. And they talked of Brodrick.

"There are n't many husbands," she said, "who would let their wives go off like this for months at a time."

"Not many. He has his merits."

"When you think of the life I lead him at home it takes heaps off his merit. The kindest thing I can do to him is to go away and stay away. George, you don't know how I've tormented the poor darling."

"I can imagine."

"He was an angel to bear it."

She became pensive at the recollection.

"Sometimes I wonder whether I ought, really, to have married. You told me that I ought n't."

"When?"

"Six years ago."

"Well — I'm inclined to say so still. Only, *the* unpardonable sin in a great artist — is n't so much marrying as marrying the wrong person."

"He is n't the wrong person for me. But I'm afraid I'm the wrong person for him."

"It comes to the same thing."

"Not altogether." She pondered. "No doubt God had some wise purpose when he made Hugh marry me. I can *see* the wise purpose in Owen's marrying Laura, and the wise purpose in his not marrying Nina; but when it comes to poor, innocent Hugh tying himself up for ever and ever with a woman like me —"

"Don't put it on God. His purpose was wise enough."

"What was it?"

"Why — obviously — that I should have married you, that Hugh should have married Gertrude, and that some reputable young draper should have married Rose."

"Poor little Rose!"

"Poor little Rose would have been happy with her draper; Gertrude would have been happy with Brodrick; you — no, I, would have been divinely happy with you."

She laughed. "Oh, would you!"

"*That* was the heaven-appointed scheme. And there we were,

all five of us, bent on frustrating the divine will — I beg Gertrude's pardon — Gertrude's will was entirely in accord."

"It sounds delightfully simple, but I doubt if it would have worked out so. We've all got as much of each other as we want."

"That's what we have n't got. Very large, important pieces of each of us have been taken and given to the wrong person. Look at you — look at me."

She looked at him. "My dear, the largest and most important part of you is kept well out of the reach of Rose's little fingers. You and I have quite as much of each other as is good for us. If *we* were to tear each other to pieces there'd be nothing left of us."

Thus lightly they handled it, setting out in the morning.

Their pace slackened. They had begun to think.

She had always been a little hard on him about Rose, Tanqueray thought. It was as if she accused him, or rather his genius, of a monstrous egoism. Surely that only meant that it was indomitably sound and sane. A reckless sanity it had, a soundness capable of any risks. There never was any man who so defiled the forces of dissolution, who had so profound an instinct of self-preservation.

Such a nature was bound to be inhospitable to parasites. By the very ease with which it assimilated all food of earth and heaven, it starved them at the roots.

It was not that he deliberately cast off any tender thing that clung to him. It was that the sheer impulse of growth in him was so tremendous that it burst through and out-soared the embracing and aspiring bonds. His cruelty (for it *was* cruelty from the poor parasite's point of view) was like Nature's, unconscious and impersonal.

It was not his fault, therefore, if Rose's arms, try as she would, could never hold him. It was not that he was indifferent to Rose or to her suffering, or that he shrank in moral cowardice from dealing with it as a man should deal. It was that the voice of implacably wise, and indubitably sane instincts warned him that he would accomplish no great thing if he turned to

contemplate her tragedy, still less if he accepted it as his own. Incorruptible impulses urged him to evasion. And it was thus that in the seven years of his marriage he had achieved almost complete oblivion of her.

But Jane — Jane was a creature of like impulses and of the same stature as he. Her dependence on him, if she was dependent, was for such things as overflowed from him, that cost him no effort to bestow. And she gave as superbly as she received. There was nothing in the least parasitic about Jane. She had the freedom of all the spaces of earth and heaven. She could tramp the hills beside him with the same breath and stride.

He had given her his hand for the last steep ascent. She sprang to it and took it in her fine, firm grasp; but he felt no great pull upon his arm. She kept step with him and reached the top unflushed, unpanting.

Watching her, he saw how marriage had ripened her slender body and given to it the beauty that it had lacked. She was more feminine than ever. She had added that invincible quality to the sexless charm that had drawn him hitherto, drawn him irresistibly, but on paths remote from disaster.

(He had forgotten that he had been aware that she was formidable ever since he had first realized that she belonged to another man.)

They lunched at Post Bridge, at the little inn that Tanqueray knew. They drove (a sudden inspiration seizing them) to Merivale and back. They stopped at their inn again for tea, and faced untired the long tramp of the return. It was evening when they reached the last moor that lay between them and the farm lane.

The long uphill road unwound itself before them, a dun-white band flung across the darkening down. A veil of grey air was drawn across the landscape. To their left the further moors streamed to the horizon, line after line, curve after curve, fluent in the watery air. Nearer, on the hillside to their right, under the haze that drenched its green to darkness, the furze threw out its unquenchable gold.

Jane was afraid of her thoughts and Tanqueray's. She talked incessantly. She looked around her and made him see how patches of furze seen under a haze showed flattened, with dark bitten edges, clinging close like lichen on a granite wall; and how, down the hillsides, in the beds of perished streams, the green grass ran like water.

"I love your voice," he said, "but I wish you'd look at me when you're talking."

"If I did," she said, "I could n't talk."

The truth leaped out of her, and she drew in her breath, as if thus she could recall it; seeing all that it meant, and knowing that he who saw everything must see.

A silence fell on them. It lasted till they topped the rise.

Then Tanqueray spoke.

"Yes. A precious hash we've all made of it. You and I and Brodrick and poor Nina. Could anything be more fatuous, more perverse?"

"Not all of us. Not Owen. He did n't go far wrong when he married Laura."

"Because the beast's clairvoyant. And love only made him more so; while it makes us poor devils blind as bats."

"There's a dear little bat just gone by us. He's so happy."

"Ah — you should see him trying to fly by daylight."

Silence and the lucid twilight held them close.

"Jinny — do you remember that walk we had once, coming back from Wendover?"

She did not answer him.

"Jinny — we're there again and where we were then. We've slipped everything between. Positively, I can't remember now what came between."

It was her state, also. She could have owned it. Only that to her it was strange and terrible, the facility with which they had annihilated time and circumstance, all that had come between. It was part of their vitality, the way they let slip the things that hurt, the way they plunged into oblivion and emerged new-made.

"We must have gone wrong somewhere, in the beginning," he said.

"Don't let's talk about it any more."

"It's better to talk about it than to bottle it up inside us. That turns it to poison."

"Yes."

"And haven't we always told the truth to each other?"

"Not in the beginning. If we only had ——"

"We did n't know it then."

"I knew it," she said.

"Why did n't you tell me, then?"

"You know what you'd have thought of me if I had."

"You should n't have cared what I thought. You should have risked it."

"Risked it?"

"Risked it."

"But I risked losing you altogether. What did *you* risk?"

He was silent.

"Why do you blame me? It was your fault, your choice."

"Was it really mine? Was it I who went wrong?"

"Yes," she said. "In the beginning. You knew I cared for you."

"If you'd let me see it."

"Oh, you saw it. I did n't tell you in as many words. But I let you see it. *That* was where I went wrong."

"Yes, yes." He assented, for it was truth's hour. "You should have made me *feel* it."

"How could I?"

"That was it. You could n't."

"I could n't when I knew you'd seen it."

"How did you know?"

"Oh — *you* took good care of that."

"Was I a brute? Was I a brute to you, Jinny?"

She smiled.

"Not as men go. You could n't help it. There was no deceiving me."

"Why, after all, should n't you have told me?"

"Why indeed?"

"It's a preposterous convention that leaves all the truth-telling to the unhappy man."

"Still — there it is. We can't get over it."

"*You* could have got over it. It was n't made for you."

"It was made for all women. And for one who has been wrecked by it there are millions who have been saved. It was made for me more than any of them."

"If you prefer other women's conventions to your own happiness."

"Would it have been happiness to have given my heart and my soul to somebody who had no use for them and showed it?"

"You insist that I showed it?"

"You showed me plainly that it was n't my heart and my soul you wanted."

"There you're wrong. There was a moment — if you'd only known it."

"I did know."

"What did you know?"

"I knew there was some power I had, if I had known how to use it."

"And did n't you?"

"I don't know. You see, I did n't try."

"You know how to use it now, I can tell you, with a vengeance."

"No. It is n't the same power, I think."

"At any rate you knew that it was touch and go with me? That if *you* 'd chosen you might have done anything with me?"

"I knew that any other woman could have done the same."

"Then why not you?"

"I? I didn't want to hold you that way. I had some decency. I loved my poor friend too much to take him at a disadvantage."

"Good God! So *that* was your view of it? I was sacrificed to your invincible ignorance."

"Oh no, to my knowledge. Or shall we say to an honourable scruple?"

"Honourable?"

"Yes. The whole honour of women lies in that."

"I hope you see where the whole honour of women has landed us at last."

They had reached the lane leading to their farm. Its depth held them closer than the twilight held. The trees guarded them. Every green branch roofed a hollow deep with haze.

"If you were a cold woman I could understand it."

"I could n't. It's because I was anything but cold."

"I know. You were afraid then."

"Yes. I was mortally afraid."

Above the lane, on the slope of the foot hills, they could see their farm, a dim grey roof in a ring of ash-trees. A dim green field opened out below it, fan-wise with a wild edge that touched the moor. It seemed to her with her altered memory that it was home they were drawing near.

"George," she said, "you know women as God knows them; why did n't you know me? Can't you see what I was afraid of? What we're all afraid of? What we're eternally trying to escape from? The thing that hunts us down, that turns again and rends us."

"You thought you saw that in me?"

"I don't see it now."

"Not now," he whispered.

They had come to the porch of the farmhouse. The door stood open. The lamp-light drew them in. He closed the door behind them. She stood facing him as one who waits.

"Not now," he said aloud.

He glanced round. The house and all about it was still.

"If we could always be here, Jinny ——"

She turned from him, afraid.

"Why not?" he said, and followed her and took her in his arms.

He pressed back her head with one hand. His face sought

hers, the face she knew, with its look of impetuous flight, of curves blown back, the face that seemed to lean forward, breasting the wind of its own speed. It leaned now, swift to its desire. It covered her face. Its lips were pressed to her lips, lips that drank her breath, that were fierce in their drinking, after their long thirst. She pushed it from her with her two hands and cried out, "Rose, little Rose!"

She struggled from his arms and ran from him, stumbling up the steep stairs. A door opened and shut. He heard her feet go slowly on the floor of her room above him. They reached the bed. She seemed to sink there.

LXIII

THAT night she knew that she must leave Dartmoor, and go somewhere where George Tanqueray could not follow her and find her. She was mortally afraid of him. He had tracked and hunted her down swiftly and more inevitably than any destroyer or pursuer.

In spite of him, indeed because of him, her passion for this solitude of the moors was strong upon her, and she planned to move on the next day into Somerset, to a place on Exmoor that she knew. She would leave very early in the morning before Tanqueray could come to her.

She lay all night staring with hot eyes at the white walls that held her. At daylight she dropped asleep and slept on into the morning. When she woke she faced her purpose wide-eyed and unflinching. Her fear was there also and she faced it.

She was down too late for any train that could take her away before noon, and Tanqueray might come now at any time.

She was so late that the day's letters waited for her on the window-sill. In her agitation she nearly missed seeing them. One was from Gertrude, fulfilling punctually her pledge, assuring her as usual that all was well. The other was from her brother-in-law, Henry. It was very brief. Henry, after expressing the hope that she continued to benefit by the air of Dartmoor, supposed that she would have heard that Hugh was suffering from a chill he had caught by motoring without an overcoat.

She had not heard it. She read Gertrude's letter again to make sure. Among all the things, the absolutely unnecessary things, that Gertrude had mentioned, she had not mentioned that. She had broken her pledge.

They kept things from her, then. Heaven only knew what they had kept.

She read Henry's letter again. There were no details, but her mind supplied them as it grasped the sense of what he *had* written. There rose before her instantly a vision of Hugh lying in his bed ill. He had a racing pulse, a flaming temperature. He was in for gastritis, at the least, if it was not pneumonia. She saw with intolerable vividness a long procession of terrors and disasters, from their cause, the chill, down to their remotest consequences. Her imagination never missed one.

And instantly there went from her the passion of her solitude, and the splendour of the moors perished around her like an imperfect dream, and her genius that had driven her there and held her let go its hold. It was as if it owned that it was beaten. She had no more fear of it. And she had no more fear of George Tanqueray.

Nothing existed for her but the fear that hung round Brodrick in his bed. This vision of calamity was unspeakable, it was worse than all the calamities that had actually been. It was worse through its significance and premonition than the illness of her little son; it was worse than the loss of her little dead-born daughter; it brought back to her with a more unendurable pang that everlasting warning utterance of Nina's, "With you — there'll be no end to your paying." Her heart cried out to powers discerned as implacable, "Anything but that! Anything but that!"

She had missed the first possible train to Waterloo, but there was another from a station five miles distant which would bring her home early in the evening. She packed hurriedly and sent one of the farm people to the village for a fly. Then she paced the room, maddening over the hours that she had still to spare.

Once or twice it occurred to her that perhaps, after all, Hugh was not so very ill. If he had been Henry would have told her. He would have suggested the propriety of her return. And Henry's brief reference to Dartmoor had suggested continuance rather than return.

But her fear remained with her. It made her forget all about George Tanqueray.

It was the sudden striking of ten o'clock that recalled to her her certainty that he would come. And he was there in the doorway before her mind had time to adjust itself to his appearance.

She fell on him with Hugh's illness as if it were a weapon and she would have slain him with it.

He stood back and denied the fact she hurled at him. As evidence supporting his denial, he produced his recent correspondence with the editor. He had heard from him that morning, and he was all right then. Jinny was being "had," he said.

He had not come there to talk about Brodrick, or to think about him. He was not going to let Jinny think about him either.

He had come early because he wanted to find her with all the dreams of the night about her, before her passion (he was sure of it) could be overtaken by the mood of the cool morning.

Jinny had begun to pack her manuscript (she had forgotten it till now) in the leather case it travelled in. She had a hat with a long veil on. Tanqueray's gaze took in all this and other more unmistakable signs of her departure.

"What do you think you're doing?" he said.

"I'm going back."

"Why?"

"Have n't I told you?"

Positively he had forgotten Brodrick.

He began all over again and continued, tenderly, patiently, with all his cold, ascendant, dispassionate lucidity, till he had convinced her that her fear was folly.

She was grateful to him for that.

"All the same," she said, "I'm going. I was n't going to stay here in any case."

"You were going?"

"Yes."

"And do you suppose I'm going to let you go? After last night?"

"After — last — night — I *must* go. And I must go back."

"No. Remember what you said to me last night. We know ourselves and we know each other now as God knows us. We're not afraid of ourselves or of each other any more."

"No," she said. "I am not afraid."

"Well — you've had the courage to get so far, why haven't you the courage to go on?"

"You think I'm a coward still?"

"A coward." He paused. "I beg your pardon. I forgot that you had the courage to go back."

Her face hardened as they looked at each other.

"I believe after all," he said, "you're a cold little devil. You stand there staring at me and you don't care a damn."

"As far as damns go, it was you, if you remember, that did n't care."

"Are you always going to bring that up against me? I suppose you'll remind me next that you're a married woman and the mother of two children."

"We do seem rather to have forgotten it," she said.

"Jinny — *that* ought never to have happened. You should have left that to the other women."

"Why, George, that's what you said six years ago, if you remember."

"You *are* ——"

"Yes, I know I am. You've just said so."

"My God. I don't care what you are."

He came to her and stood by her, with his face close to her, not touching hers, but very close. His eyes searched her. She stood rigid in her supernatural self-possession.

"Jinny, you knew. You knew all the time I cared."

"I thought I knew. I did know you cared in a way. But not in this way. This — this is different."

She was trying to tell him that hitherto his passion had been to her such a fiery intellectual thing *that* it had saved her — as by fire.

"It is n't different," he said gravely. "Jinny — if I only wanted you for myself — but that does n't count as much as you think it does. If you did n't suffer ——"

"I'm not suffering."

"You are. Every nerve's in torture. Have n't I seen you? You're ill with it now, with the bare idea of going back. I want to take you out of all that."

"No, no. It is n't that. I want to go."

"You don't. You don't want to own that you're beaten."

"No. It's simpler than that. I don't care for you, George, not — not as you want me to."

He smiled. "How do you think I want you to?"

"Well — you know."

"I know that I care so much that it does n't matter how you care, or whether you care or not, so long as I can put a stop to that brutality."

"There is n't any brutality. I've got everything a woman can want."

"You've got everything any other woman can want."

She closed her eyes. "I'm quite happy."

"For heaven's sake be honest. What is the use of lying, to me of all people? Don't I know how happy you are?"

"But I am — I am, George. It's only this horrid, devilish thing that's been tacked on to me ——"

"That beautiful, divine thing that God made part of you, the thing that you should have loved and made sacrifices to — if there were to have been sacrifices — the thing you've outraged and frustrated, and done your best to destroy, in your blind, senseless lust for what you call happiness. You've no right to make It suffer."

"They say suffering's the best thing that can happen to it."

"Not Its suffering. *Your* suffering is — the pain that makes you alive, that stings and urges and keeps you going — going till you drop. To feel the pull of the bit when you swerve on the road — Its road — to have the lash laid about your shoulders when you jib — that's good. You women need the lash more than we because you're more given to swerving

and jibbing. Look at Nina. *She* was lashed into it if any woman ever was."

"She is n't the only one, George."

"I hope she is n't. God is good to the great artists sometimes, and he was good to her."

"Do you suppose Laura thinks so?"

"Laura's not a great artist."

"And do you suppose Owen was thinking of Nina's genius when he married Laura instead of her?"

"I don't think that Owen was thinking at all. It's not the thinkers who are tools in the hands of destiny, dear child."

His gaze fell on the manuscript she was packing.

"Jinny, you know — you've always known that you can't do anything without me."

"It seems as if I could n't," she admitted.

"Well — be honest with me."

She looked at her watch. "There's not much time for me to be honest in, but I'll try."

She sat down. She meditated a moment, making it out.

"You're right. I can't do much without you. I'm not perfectly alive when you're not there. And I can't get away from you — as I can get away from Hugh. I believe I remember every single thing you ever said to me. I'm always wanting to talk to you. I don't want — always — to talk to Hugh. But — I think more of him."

It seemed to her that it was only now that she really made it out. Her fear had been no test, it threw no light on her, and it had passed. It was only now, with Tanqueray's passionately logical issue facing her, that she knew herself aright.

"There's another thing. I can't be sorry for you. I know I'm hurting you, and I don't seem to care a bit. You can't make me sorry for you. But I'm sorry for Hugh all the time."

"God forbid that you should be sorry for me, then."

"God does forbid it. It's not that Hugh *makes* me sorry for him; he never lets me know; but I do know. When his little finger aches I know it, and I ache all over — I think it's aching a bit now; that's what makes me want to go back to him."



She closed her eyes, "I'm quite happy"

"I see — Pity," said the psychologist.

"No. Not pity. It's simply that I know he needs me more than you do. That's why I need him more than I need you."

"Pity," he reiterated, with a more insistent stress.

"No."

"Never mind what it is, if it's something that you haven't got for me."

"It is something that I haven't got for you. There is n't time," she said, "to go into all that."

As she spoke he heard wheels grinding the stones in the upper lane, the shriek of the brake grinding the wheel, and the shuffling of men's feet on the flagged yard outside.

He shut to the door and faced her, making his last stand.

"You know what you're going back to."

"I know."

"To suffer," he said, "and to cause suffering — to one — two — three — innocent people."

"No. Things will be different."

"They won't. *We* shall be the same."

She shook her head a little helplessly.

"At any rate," he said, "*you* won't be different."

"If I could — if I only could be ——"

"But you can't. You know you can't."

"I can — if I give it up — once for all."

"What? Your divine genius?"

"Whatever it is. When I've killed that part of me I shall be all right. I mean — *they* 'll be all right."

"You can't kill it. You can starve it, drug it, paralyze it, but you can't kill it. It's stronger than you. You'll go through hell — I know it, I've been there — you'll be like a drunkard trying to break himself of the drink habit."

"Yes. But some day I shall break myself, or be broken; and there 'll be peace."

"Will there!"

"There 'll be something."

She rose. The wheels sounded nearer, and stopped. The gate of the farmyard opened. The feet of the men were at the door.

LXIV

WHATEVER Tanqueray thought of Brodrick's chill, it and the fear it inspired in Gertrude had been grave enough to keep him in the house. For three days (the last of September) he had not been in Fleet Street, in his office.

There was agitation there, and agitation in the mind of the editor and of his secretary. Tanqueray's serial was running its devastating course through the magazine, and the last instalment of the manuscript was overdue (Tanqueray was always a little late with his instalments). Brodrick was worried, and Gertrude, at work with him in his study, tried to soothe him. They telephoned to the office for the manuscript. The manuscript was not there. The clerk suggested that it was probably still with the type-writer, Miss Ranger. They telephoned to Miss Ranger, who replied that the manuscript had been typed and sent to the author three weeks ago for revision.

Brodrick sent a messenger to Tanqueray's house for the manuscript. He returned towards evening with a message that Mrs. Tanqueray was out, Mr. Tanqueray was in the country and the servant did not know his address.

They telegraphed to Addy Ranger's rooms for his address. The reply came, "Post Office, Okehampton, Devon."

Brodrick repeated it with satisfaction as he wrote it down: "Post Office, Okehampton, Devon."

Gertrude was silent.

"He's got friends somewhere in Devonshire," Brodrick said.

"At the Post Office?" she murmured.

"Of course — if they're motoring."

Gertrude was again silent (she achieved her effects mainly by silences).

"We'd better send the wire there," said Brodrick.

They sent it there first thing in the morning.

Before noon a message came from Mrs. Tanqueray: "Address, 'The Manor, Wilbury, Wilts.' Have sent your message there."

Admirable Mrs. Tanqueray!

"We've sent *our* wire to the wrong address," said Brodrick.

"It's the right one, I fancy, if Miss Ranger has it."

"Mrs. Tanqueray's got the wrong one, then?"

They looked at each other. Gertrude's face was smooth and still, but her eyes searched him, asking what his thoughts were.

They sent a wire to Wilbury.

Three days passed. No answer to their wires and no manuscript.

"He's left Okehampton, I suppose," said Brodrick.

"Or has he left Wilbury?"

"We'll send another wire there, to make sure."

She wrote out the form obediently. Then she spoke again.

"Of course he's at Okehampton." Her voice had an accent of joyous certainty.

"Why 'of course'?"

"Because he went to Wilbury first. Mrs. Tanqueray said she sent our message there—the one we sent three days ago. So he's left Wilbury and he's staying in Okehampton."

"It looks like it."

"And yet—you'd have thought he'd have let his wife know if he was staying."

"He probably is n't."

"He must be. The manuscript went there."

"Let's hope so, then we may get it to-morrow."

It was as if he desired to impress upon her that the manuscript was the important thing.

It came as he had anticipated the next day. Miss Ranger sent it up by special messenger.

"Good!" said Brodrick.

He undid the parcel hurriedly. The inner cover was addressed to Miss Ranger in Tanqueray's handwriting. It bore the post-mark, Chagford.

"He's been at Chagford all the time!" said Gertrude.

(She had picked up the wrapper which Brodrick had thrown upon the floor.)

Silence.

"T-t-t. It would have saved a day," she said, "if he'd sent this direct to you instead of to Miss Ranger. Why could n't he when he knew we were so rushed?"

"Why, indeed?" he thought.

"There must have been more corrections," he said.

"She can't have typed them in the time," said Gertrude. She was examining the inner cover. "Besides, she has sent it on unopened."

"Excellent Miss Ranger!"

He said it with a certain levity. But even as he said it his brain accepted the inference she forced on it. If Tanqueray had not sent his manuscript to Camden Town for corrections, he had sent it there for another reason. The parcel was registered. There was no letter inside it.

Brodrick's hand trembled as he turned over the pages of the manuscript. Gertrude's eyes were fixed upon its trembling.

A few savage ink-scratches in Tanqueray's handwriting told where Miss Ranger had blundered; otherwise the manuscript was clean. Tanqueray had at last satisfied his passion for perfection.

All this Brodrick's brain took in while his eyes, feverish and intent, searched the blank spaces of the manuscript. He knew what he was looking for. It would be there, on the wide margin left for her, that he would find the evidence that his wife and Tanqueray were together. He knew the signs of her. Not a manuscript of Tanqueray's, not one of his last great books, but bore them, the queer, delicate, nervous pencil-markings that Tanqueray, with all his furious erasures, left untouched. Sometimes (Brodrick had noticed) he would enclose them in a sort of holy circle of red ink, to show that they were not for incorporation in the text. But it was not in him to destroy a word that she had written.

But he could find no trace of her. He merely made out some humble queryings of Miss Ranger, automatically erased.

The manuscript was in three Parts. As he laid down each, Gertrude put forth a quiet hand and drew it to herself. He was too much preoccupied to notice how minutely and with what intent and passionate anxiety she examined it.

He was arranging the manuscript in order. Gertrude was absorbed in Part Three. He had reached out for it when he remembered that the original draft of Part Two had contained a passage as to which he had endeavoured to exercise an ancient editorial right. He looked to see whether Tanqueray had removed it.

He had not. The passage stood, naked and immense, tremendous as some monument of primeval nature, alone in literature, simple, superb, immortal; irremovable by any prayer. Brodrick looked at it now with a clearer vision. He acknowledged its grandeur and bowed his head to the power that was Tanqueray. Had he not been first to recognize it? It was as if his suspicion of the man urged him to a larger justice towards the writer.

He turned to Gertrude. "There are no alterations to be made, thank heaven ——"

"How about this?"

She slid the manuscript under his arm; her finger pointed to the margin. He saw nothing.

"What?" He spoke with some irritation.

"This."

She turned up the lamp so that the light fell full upon the page. He bent closer. On the margin, so blurred as to be almost indecipherable, he saw his wife's sign, a square of delicate script. To a careless reader it might have seemed to have been written with a light pencil and to have been meant to stand. Examined closely it revealed the firm strokes of a heavy lead obliterated with india-rubber. Gertrude's finger slid away and left him free to turn the pages. There were several of these marks in the same handwriting, each one deliberately erased. The manuscript had been in his wife's hand within the last three days; for three days certainly Tanqueray had been in Chagford, and for three weeks for all Brodrick knew.

There was no reason why he should not be there, no reason why they should not be together. Then why these pitiable attempts at concealment, at the covering of the tracks?

And yet, after all, they had not covered them. They had only betrayed the fact that they had tried. Had they? And which of them? Tanqueray in the matter of obliteration would at any rate have been aware of the utter inadequacy of india-rubber. To dash at a thing like india-rubber was more the sudden, futile inspiration of a woman made frantic by her terror of detection.

It was clear that Jane had not wanted him to know that Tanqueray was at Chagford. She had not told him. Why had she not told him? She knew of the plight they were in at the office, of the hue and cry after the unappearing manuscript.

So his brain worked, with a savage independence. He seemed to himself two men, a man with a brain that worked, following a lucid argument to an obscure conclusion, and a man who looked on and watched its workings without attaching the least importance to it. It was as if *this* man knew all the time what the other did not know. He had his own light, his own secret. He had never thought about it before (his secret), still less had he talked about it. Thinking about it was a kind of profanity; talking would have been inconceivable sacrilege. It was self-evident as the existence of God to the soul that loves him; a secret only in that it was profounder than appearances, in that it stood by the denial of appearances, so that, if appearances were against it, what of that?

He was thinking about it now, obscurely, without images, barely with words, as if it had been indeed a thing occult and metaphysical.

Thinking about it — that meant, of course, that he had for a moment doubted it? It was coming back to him now, clothed with the moral pathos of its imperfection. She was dearer to him — unspeakably dearer, for his doubt.

The man with the brain approached slowly and unwillingly the conclusion that now emerged, monstrous and abominable,

from the obscurity. If that be so, he said, she is deliberately deceiving me.

And he who watched, he with the illuminating, incommunicable secret, smiled as he watched, in scorn and pity. Scorn of the slow and ugly movements of the intellect, and pity for a creature so mean as to employ them.

In the silence that he kept he had not heard the deep breathing of the woman at his side. Now he was aware of it and her.

He was positively relieved when the servant announced Mrs. Levine.

There was a look on Sophy's face that Brodrick knew, a look of importance and of competence, a look it always had when Sophy was about to deal with a situation. Gertrude's silent disappearance marked her sense of a situation to be dealt with.

Brodrick rose heavily to greet his sister. There was a certain consolation in her presence, since it had relieved him of Gertrude's. Sophy, by way of prelude, inquired about Brodrick and the children and the house, then paused to attack her theme.

"When's Jane coming back?" said she.

"I don't know," said Brodrick.

"She's been away two months."

"Seven weeks," said Brodrick.

"Is n't it about time she *did* come back?"

"She's the best judge of that," said Brodrick.

Sophy's face was extraordinarily clear-eyed and candid as it turned on him.

"George Tanqueray's at Chagford."

"How do you know?" (He really wondered.)

"Miss Ranger let it out to Louis this morning."

"Let it out? Why on earth should she keep it in?"

"Oh well, I don't suppose *she* sees anything in it."

"No more do I," said Brodrick.

"You never saw anything," said Sophy. "I don't say there's anything to see — all the same ——"

She paused.

"Well?" He was all attention and politeness.

"All the same I should insist on her coming back."

He was silent, as though he were considering it.

"Or better still, go down and fetch her."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Well, if you think it's wise to give her her head to that extent — a woman with Jane's temperament —"

"What do you know about her temperament?"

Sophy shifted her ground. "I know, and you know the effect he has on her, and the influence; and if you leave her to him — if you leave them to themselves, down there — for weeks like that — you'll have nobody but yourself to thank if —"

He cut her short.

"I have nobody but myself to thank. She shall please herself about coming back. If she didn't come — I could n't blame her."

Sophy was speechless. Of all the attitudes that any Brodrick could take she had not expected this.

"We have made things too hard for her —" he said.

"We?"

"You and I — all of us. We've not seen what was in her."

Sophy repressed her opinion that they very probably would see now. As there was no use arguing with him in his present mood (she could see *that*), she left him.

Brodrick heard her motor hooting down Roehampton Lane. She was going to dine at Henry's. Presently all the family would be in possession of the situation, of Jane's conduct and his attitude. And there was Gertrude Collett. He understood now that she suspected.

Gertrude had come back into her place.

He picked up some papers and took them to the safe which stood in another corner of the room behind his writing-table. He wanted to get away from Gertrude, to be alone with his secret and concealed, without betraying his desire for solitude, for concealment. He knelt down by the safe and busied himself there quite a long time. He said to himself, "It could n't

happen. She was always honest with me. But if it did I could n't wonder. The wonder is why she married me."

He rose to his feet, saying to himself again, "It could n't happen."

With that slight readjusting movement the two men in him became one, so that when the reasoning man reached slowly his conclusion he formulated it thus: "It could n't happen. If it did, it would n't happen this way. He" (even to himself he could not say "they") "would have managed better, or worse." At last his intellect, the lazy, powerful beast, was roused and dealt masterfully with the situation.

He had to pass the fireplace to get back to his seat, which Gertrude guarded. As he passed he caught sight of his own face in the glass over the chimneypiece, a face with inflamed eyes and a forehead frowning and overcast, and cheeks flushed with shame. Gertrude, looking up at him from the manuscript she brooded over, instinctively made way for him to pass.

It was she who spoke first. Her finger was on the pencil-marks again.

"Then that," said she, pointing, "that is not to stand?"

"Of course it is n't." He answered coldly. "It was n't meant to. It's rubbed out."

He looked at her for the first time with dislike. He did not suspect her as the source of abominable suggestion. He was only thinking that if it had n't been for her he would n't have seen any of these things.

She shrank before his look. "Does he think I wanted him to see it?" she said to herself.

Already she was clean in her own eyes. Already she had persuaded herself that she had not wanted that. And in the same breath of thought she asked herself, "What *did* he see?"

She smiled as she answered his cold answer.

"I thought it was rubbed out, but I could n't be quite sure."

They were so absorbed that they did not hear the door open.

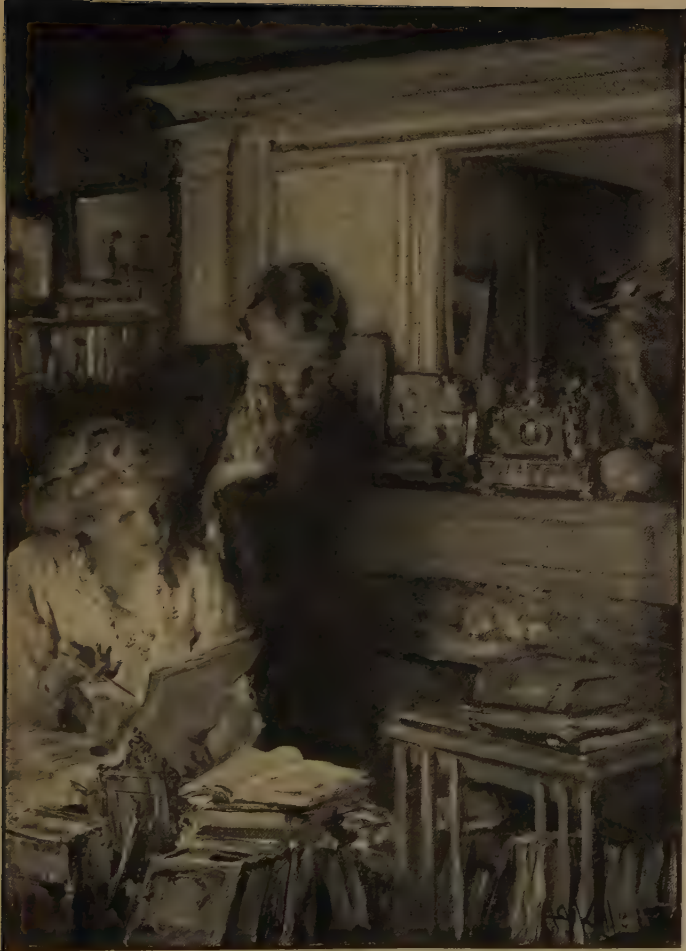
Jane stood in the doorway quietly regarding them.

THERE were people who knew for a fact that Jane Holland (Mrs. Hugh Brodrick) had run away with George Tanqueray. The rumour ran through the literary circles shunned by Tanqueray and Jane. The theory of her guilt was embraced with excitement by the dreadful, clever little people. Not one of them would have confessed to a positive desire to catch her tripping. But now that the thing had happened it satisfied the craving for complete vision of the celebrated lady. It reduced considerably her baffling eminence, and dispersed once for all the impenetrable, irritating atmosphere of secrecy she had kept up.

There was George Tanqueray, too, who had kept it up even longer and more successfully. At last they had been caught, the two so insolent in their swift evasion of pursuit. Their fall, so to speak, enabled the hunter to come up with them. People who had complained that they could never meet them, who had wanted to meet them solely that they might talk about them afterwards, who had never been able to talk about them at all, had now abundant material for conversation.

The rumour, once it had fairly penetrated, spread over London in five days. It started in Kensington, ran thence all the way to Chelsea, skipped to Bloomsbury, and spread from these centres into Belgravia and Mayfair. In three weeks the tale of George Tanqueray and Jane Holland (Mrs. Hugh Brodrick) had invaded Hampstead and the Southwestern suburbs. It was only confirmed by the contemptuous silence and curt denials of their friends, Arnott Nicholson, Caro Bickersteth, Nina Lempriere and the Protheros.

In Brodrick's family it sank down deep, below the level of permissible discussion. But it revealed itself presently in an awful external upheaval, utterly unforeseen, and in a still more unforeseen subsidence.



Jane stood in the doorway, quietly regarding them

There was first of all a split between Mrs. Heron and the Doctor. The behaviour of Eddy and Winny, especially of Eddy, had got on the Doctor's nerves (he had confessed, in a moment of intense provocation, to having them). Eddy one evening had attacked violently the impermissible topic, defending Jin-Jin (in the presence of his younger sister) from the unspeakable charge current in their suburb, taxing his uncle with a monstrous credence of the impossible, and trying to prove to him that it *was* impossible.

For the sake of the peace so beloved by Brodricks it was settled that Frances and her children should live with poor dear John in the big house in Augustus Road.

Brodrick then suggested that Gertrude Collett might with advantage keep house for Henry.

This arrangement covered the dreadful rupture, the intolerable situation at Moor Grange. Gertrude had contributed nothing to the support of the rumour beyond an intimation that the rupture (between her and the Brodricks) *was* dreadful and the situation intolerable. The intimation, as conveyed by Gertrude, was delicate and subtle to a degree. All that she would admit in words was a certain lack of spiritual sympathy between her and Mrs. Brodrick.

It was felt in Brodrick's family that, concerning Jane and Tanqueray, Gertrude Collett knew considerably more than she cared to say.

And through it all Brodrick guarded his secret.

The rumour had not yet touched him whom it most affected. It never would touch him, so securely the secret he guarded guarded him. And though it had reached Hampstead the rumour had not reached Rose.

Rose had her hands full for once with the Protheros, helping Mrs. Prothero to look after *him*. For Owen was ill, dreadfully and definitely ill, with an illness you could put a name to. Dr. Brodrick was attending him. Owen had consulted him casually the year before, and the Doctor had then discovered a bell-sound in his left lung. Now he came regularly once or twice a week all the way from Putney in his motor-car.

Rose had positively envied Laura, who had a husband who could be ill, who could be tucked up in bed and taken care of. It was Rose who helped Laura to make Prothero's big room look for all the world like the ward of a hospital.

Dr. Brodrick had wanted to take him away to a sanatorium, but Prothero had refused flatly to be taken anywhere. The traveller was tired of travelling. He loved with passion this place where he had found peace, where his wandering genius had made its sanctuary and its home. His repugnance was so violent and invincible that the Doctor had agreed with Laura that it would do more harm than good to insist on his removal. She must do as best she could, with (he suggested) the assistance of a trained nurse.

Laura had very soon let him know what she could do. She had winced visibly when she heard of the trained nurse. It would be anguish to her to see another woman beside Owen's bed and her hands touching him; but she said she supposed she could bear even that if it would save him, if it were absolutely necessary. Was it? The Doctor had admitted that it was not so, if she insisted — absolutely — for the present; but it was advisable if she wished to save herself. Laura had smiled then, very quietly.

In twenty-four hours she showed him the great room, bare and clean as the ward of a hospital (Rose was on her knees on the floor, bees-waxing it). The long rows of bookcases were gone, so were the pictures. He could n't put his finger on a single small unnecessary thing. Laura, cool and clean in a linen gown, defied him to find a chink where a germ could lodge. Prothero inquired gaily, if they could n't make a good fight there, where could they make it?

Henry, although used to these combats, was singularly affected as he looked upon the scene, stripped as it was for the last struggle. What moved him most was the sight of Laura's little bed, set under the north window, and separated from her husband's by the long empty space between, through which the winds of heaven rushed freely. It showed him what the little thing was capable of, day and night, night and day, the undying, indom-

itable devotion. That was the stuff a man wanted in his wife. He thought of his brother Hugh. Why on earth, if he had to marry one of them, had n't he married *her*? He was moved too and troubled by the presence there of Tanqueray's poor little wife. Whatever view truth compelled you to take of Jane's and Tanqueray's relations, Tanqueray's wife had, from first to last, been cruelly wronged by both of them.

Tanqueray's wife was so absorbed in the fight they were making as to be apparently indifferent to her wrongs, and they judged that the legend of Jane Holland and George Tanqueray had not reached her.

It had not. And yet she knew it, she had known it all the time — that they had been together. She had known it ever since, in the innocent days before the rumour, she had heard Dr. Brodrick telling Mrs. Prothero that his sister-in-law had gone down to Chagford for three months. Chagford was where he was always staying. And in the days of innocence Addy Ranger had let out that it was Chagford where he was now. She had given Rose his address, Post Office, Chagford. He had been there all the time when Rose had supposed him to be in Wiltshire and was sending all his letters there.

She did not hear of Mrs. Brodrick's return until a week or two after that event; for, in the days no longer of innocence, his sister-in-law was a sore subject with the Doctor. And when Rose did hear it finally from Laura, by that time she had heard that Tanqueray was coming back too. He had written to her to say so.

That was on a Saturday. He was not coming until Tuesday. Rose had two days in which to consider what line she meant to take.

That she meant to take a line was already clear to Rose. Perfectly clear, although her decision was arrived at through nights of misery so profound that it made most things obscure. It was clear that they could not go on as they had been doing. *He* might (nothing seemed to matter to him), but she could n't; and she would n't, not (so she put it) if it was ever so. They had been miserable.

Not that it mattered so very much whether she was miserable or no. But that was it; she had ended by making him miserable too. It took some making; for he was n't one to feel things much; he had always gone his own way as if nothing mattered. By his beginning to feel things (as she called it) now, she measured the effect she must have had on him.

It was all because she was n't educated proper, because she was n't a lady. He ought to have married a lady. He ought (she could see it now) to have married some one like Mrs. Brodrick, who could understand his talk, and enter into what he did.

There was Mr. and Mrs. Prothero now. They were happy. There was n't a thing he could say or do or think but what she understood it. Why, she'd understand, time and again, without his saying anything. That came of being educated. It came (poor Rose was driven back to it at every turn) of being a lady.

She might have known how it would be. And in a way she had known it from the first. That was why she'd been against it, and why Uncle and Aunt and her master and mistress down at Fleet had been against it too. But there — she loved him. Lady or no lady, she loved him.

As for his going away with Mrs. Brodrick, she "looked at it sensible." She understood. She saw the excuses that could be made for him. She could n't understand *her*; she could n't find one excuse for *her* behaviour, a married woman, leaving her husband — such a good man, and her children — her little helpless children, and going off for weeks together with a married man, let him be who he might be. Still, if it had n't been her, it might have been somebody else, somebody much worse. It might have been that Miss Lempriere. If *she*'d had a hold on him, *she*'d not have let him go.

For deep-bedded in Rose's obscure misery was the conviction that Jane Brodrick had let him go. Her theory of Jane's guilt had not gone much farther than the charge of deserting her little helpless children. It was as if Rose's imagination could not conceive of guilt beyond that monstrous crime. And Jane had gone back to her husband and children, after all.

If it had been Miss Lempriere she would have been bound to have stuck, she having nothing, so to speak, to go back to.

The question was, what was George coming back to? If it was to her, Rose, he must know pretty well what. He must know, she kept repeating to herself; he must know. Her line, the sensible line that she had been so long considering, was somehow to surprise and defeat his miserable foreknowledge.

By Sunday morning she had decided on her line. Nothing would turn her. She did not intend to ask anybody's advice, nor to take it were it offered. The line itself required the co-operation and, in a measure, the consent of Aunt and Uncle; and on the practical head they were consulted. She managed that on Sunday afternoon. Then she remembered that she would have to tell Mr. and Mrs. Prothero.

It was on Sunday evening that she told them.

She told them, very shortly and simply, that she had made up her mind to separate from Tanqueray and live with her uncle.

"Uncle'll be glad to 'ave me," she said.

She explained. "*He*'ll think more of me if he's not with me."

Prothero admitted that it might be likely.

"It's not," she said, "as if I was afraid of 'is taking up with another woman — serious."

(They wondered had she heard?)

"I can trust him with Mrs. Brodrick."

(They thought it strange that she should not consider Mrs. Brodrick serious. They said nothing, and in a moment Rose explained.)

"She's like all these writin' people. *I* know 'em."

"Yes," said Prothero. "We're a poor lot, are n't we?"

(It was a mercy that she did n't take it seriously.)

"Oh you — you're different."

She had always had a very clear perception of his freedom from the literary taint.

"But Mrs. Brodrick now — she does n't care for 'im. She's not likely to. She'll never care for anybody but herself."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well — a woman who could walk off like that and leave 'er little children — to say nothing of 'er husband ——"

"Is n't it," said Prothero, "what you 're proposing to do yourself?"

"I 'ave n't got any little children. She's leavin' 'er 'usband to get away from 'im, to please 'erself. I'm leavin' mine to bring 'im to me."

She paused, pensive.

"Oh, no, I'm not afraid of Mrs. Brodrick. She 'as n't got a 'eart."

"No?"

"Not wot I should call a 'eart."

"Perhaps not," said Laura.

"I used to hate her when she came about the place. Least-ways I tried to hate her, and I could n't."

She meditated in their silence.

"If it's got to be anybody it 'd best be 'er. She's given 'im all she's got to give, and he sees 'ow much it is. 'E goes to 'er, I know, and 'e 'll keep on going; and she — she 'll 'old 'im orf and on — I can see 'er doin' of it, and I don't care. As long as she 'olds 'im she keeps other women orf of 'im."

Their silence marvelled at her.

"Time and again I've cried my eyes out, and *that's* no good. I've got," said Rose, "to look at it sensible. She's really keepin' 'im for me."

Down-stairs, alone with Laura, she revealed herself more fully.

"I dare say 'e won't ever ask me to come back," she said.

"But once I've gone out of the house for good and all, 'e 'll come to me now and again. He's bound to. You see, *she's* no good to him. And maybe, if I was to 'ave a child — I might ——"

She sighed, but in her eyes there kindled a dim hope, shining through tears.

"Wot I shall miss is — workin' for 'im."

Her mouth trembled. Her tears fell.

LXVI

BETWEEN seven and eight o'clock on Tuesday evening, Tanqueray, in an execrable temper, returned to his home.

The little house had an air of bright expectancy, not to say of festival; it was so intensely, so unusually illuminated. Each window, with its drawn blind, was a golden square in the ivy-darkened wall.

Tanqueray let himself in noiselessly with his latch-key. He took up the pile of letters that waited for him on the hat-stand in the hall, and turned in to the dining-room.

It smiled at him brilliantly with all its lights. So did the table, laid for dinner; the very forks and spoons smiled, twinkling and limping in irrepressible welcome. A fire burned ostentatiously in the hearth-place. It sent out at him eager, loquacious tongues of flame, to draw him to the insufferable endearments of the hearth.

He was aware now that what he was most afraid of in this horrible coming back was his wife's insupportable affection.

He turned the lights down a little lower. All his movements were noiseless. He was afraid that Rose would hear him and would come running down.

He went up-stairs, treading quietly. He meant to take his letters to his study and read them there. He might even answer some of them. Anything to stave off the moment when he must meet Rose.

The door of her bedroom was wide open. The light flared so high that he judged that Rose was in there and about to appear. He swung himself swiftly and dexterously round the angle of the stair-rail, and so reached his own door.

She must have heard him go in, but there was no answering movement from her room.

With a closed door behind him he sat down and looked over

his letters. Bills, proofs from the "Monthly Review," a letter from Laura that saddened him (he had not realized that Prothero was so ill). Last of all, at the bottom of the pile, a little note from Rose.

She had got it all into five lines. Five lines, rather straggling, rather shapeless lines that told him with a surprising brevity that his wife had decided on an informal separation, for his good.

No resentment, no reproach, no passion and no postscript.

He went down-stairs by no means noiselessly.

In the hall, as he was putting on his hat, Susan came to him. She gave him a queer look. Dinner was ready, she said. The mistress had ordered the dinner that he liked. (Irrepressibly, insistently, thick with intolerable reminiscence, the savour of it streamed through the kitchen door.) The mistress had cooked it herself, Susan said. The mistress had told Susan that she was to be sure and make him very comfortable, and to remember what he liked for dinner. Susan's manner was a little shy and a little important, it suggested the inauguration of a new rule, a new order, a life in which Rose was not and never would be.

Tanqueray took no notice whatever of Susan as he strode out of the house.

The lights were dim in the corner house by the Heath, opposite the willows. Still, standing on the upper ground of the Heath, he could see across the road through the window of his old sitting-room, and there, in his old chair by the fireside he made out a solitary seated figure that looked like Rose.

He came out from under the willows and made for the front door. He pushed past the little maid who opened it and strode into the room. Rose turned.

There was a slight stir and hesitation, then a greeting, very formal and polite on both sides, and with Joey all the time leaping and panting and licking Tanqueray's hands. Joey's demonstration was ignored as much too emotional for the occasion.

A remark from Rose about the weather. Inquiries from Tan-

queray as to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Eldred. Further inquiries as to the health of Rose.

Silence.

"May I turn the light up?" (From Tanqueray.)

"I'd rather you let it be?" (From Rose.)

He let it be.

"Rose" (very suddenly from Tanqueray), "do you remember Mr. Robinson?"

(No response.)

"Rose, why are you sitting in this room?"

"Because I like it."

"Why do you like it?"

(No response; only a furtive movement of Rose's hand towards her pocket-handkerchief. A sudden movement of Tanqueray's, restrained, so that he appeared to have knelt on the hearthrug to caress the little dog. A long and silent stroking of Joey's back. Demonstration of ineffable affection from Joey.)

"His hair never *has* come on, has it? Do you know" (very gravely), "I'm afraid it never will."

(A faint quiver of Rose's mouth which might or might not have been a smile.)

"Rose, why did you marry me? Would n't any other hairless little dog have done as well?"

(A deep sigh from Rose.)

Tanqueray was now standing up and looking down at her in his way.

"Rose, do you remember how I came to you at Fleet, and brought you the moon in a band-box?"

She answered him with a sudden and convulsive sob.

He knelt beside her. He hesitated for a moment.

"Rose — I've brought you the band-box without the moon. Will you have it?"

She got up with a wild movement of escape. Something rolled from her lap and fell between them. She made a dash towards the object. But Tanqueray had picked it up. It was a pair of Tanqueray's gloves, neatly folded.

"What were you doing with those gloves?" he said.

"I was mendin' them," said she.

Half-an-hour later Rose and Tanqueray were walking up the East Heath Road towards their little house. Rose carried Tanqueray's gloves, and Tanqueray carried Minny, the cat, in a basket.

As they went they talked about Owen Prothero. And Tanqueray thanked God that, after all, there was something they *could* talk about.

LXVII

DR. BRODRICK had declared for the seventh time that Prothero was impossible.

His disease was advancing. Both lungs were attacked now. There was, as he perfectly well knew, consolidation at the apex of the left lung; the upper lobe had retracted, leaving his heart partially uncovered, and he knew it; you could detect also a distinct systolic murmur; and nobody could be more aware than Prothero of the gravity of these signs. Up till now, he, Brodrick, had been making a record case of him. The man had a fine constitution (he gave him credit for that); he had pluck; there was resistance, pugnacity in every nerve. He had one chance, a fighting chance. His life might be prolonged for years, if he would only rest.

And there he was, with all that terrible knowledge in him, sitting up in bed, driving that infernal pen of his as if his life depended on *that*. Scribbling verses, he was, working himself into such a state of excitement that his temperature had risen. He displayed, Brodrick said, an increasing nervous instability. When Brodrick told him that (if he wanted to know) his inspiration was hollow, had been hollow for months, and that he would recognize that as one of the worst symptoms in his case, Prothero said that his critics had always told him that. The worst symptom in his case, *he* declared, was that he could n't laugh without coughing. When Brodrick said that it was n't a laughing matter, he laughed till he spat blood and frightened himself. For he had (Brodrick had noticed it) a morbid horror of the sight of blood. You had to inject morphia after every hæmorrhage, to subdue that awful agitation.

All this the Doctor recounted to Laura, alone with her in her forlorn little drawing-room down-stairs. He unveiled for her

intelligence the whole pathology of the case. It brought him back to what he had started with, Prothero's impossibility.

"What does he do for it?" he repeated. "He knows the consequences as well as I do."

Laura said she didn't think that Owen ever had considered consequences.

"But he *must* consider them. What's a set of verses compared with his health?"

Laura answered quietly, "Owen would say what was his health compared with a set of verses? If he knew they'd be the greatest poem of his life."

"His life? My dear child ——"

The pause was terrible.

"I wish," he said, "we could get him out of this."

"He doesn't want to go. You said yourself it was n't the great thing."

He admitted it. The great thing, he reiterated, was rest. It was his one chance. He explained carefully again how good a chance it was. He dwelt on the things Prothero might yet do if he gave himself a chance. And when he had done talking Laura remarked that it was all very well, but he was reckoning without Owen's genius.

"Genius?" He shrugged his shoulders. He smiled (as if they were n't always reckoning with it at Putney!). "What is it? For medicine it's simply and solely an abnormal activity of the brain. And it *must* stop."

He stood over her impressively, marking his words with clenched fist on open palm.

"He must choose between his genius and his life."

She winced. "I don't believe he *can* choose," she murmured. "It *is* his life."

He straightened himself to his enormous height, in dignified recoil from her contradiction.

"I have known many men of genius," he said.

"His genius is different," said she.

He had n't the heart to say what he had always said, that Prothero's genius was and always had been most peculiarly a disease;

but he did not shrink from telling her that at the present crisis it was death.

For he was angry now. He could not help being moved by professional animus, the fury of a man who has brought his difficult, dangerous work to the pitch of unexpected triumph, and sees it taken from his hands and destroyed for a perversity, an incomprehensible caprice.

He was still more deeply stirred by his compassion, his affection for the Protheros. Secretly, he was very fond of Owen, though the poet *was* impossible; he was even more fond of little Laura. He did not want to see her made a widow because Prothero refused to control his vice. For the literary habit, indulged in to that extent, amounted to a vice. The Doctor had no patience with it. A man was not, after all, a slave to his unwholesome inspiration (it had dawned on him by this time that Prothero had made a joke about it). Prothero could stop it if he liked.

"I've told him plainly," he said, "that what it means to him is death. If you want to keep him, you must stop it."

"How can I?" she moaned.

"Don't encourage him. Don't let him talk about it. Don't let his mind dwell on it. Turn the conversation. Take his pens and paper from him and don't let him see them again till he is well."

When the Doctor left her she went up-stairs to Owen.

He was still sitting up writing, dashing down lines with a speed that told her what race he ran.

"Owen," she said, "you know. He told you ——"

He waved her away with a gesture that would have been violent if it could.

She tried to take his pen and paper from him, and he laid his thin hands out over the sheets. The sweat stood in big drops between the veins of his hands; it streamed from his forehead.

"Wait just a little longer, till you're well," she pleaded.

"For God's sake, darling," he whispered hoarsely, "leave me, go away."

She went. In her own room her work stood unfinished on

the table where she had left it, months ago. She pushed it away in anger. She hated the sight of it. She sat watching the clock for the moments when she would have to go to him with his medicine.

She thought how right they had been after all. Nina and Jane and Tanqueray, when they spoke of the cruelty of genius. It had no mercy and no pity. It had taken its toll from all of them. It was taking its toll from Owen now, to the last drop of his blood, to the last torturing breath. His life was nothing to it.

She went to him silently every hour to give him food or medicine or to take his temperature. She recorded on her chart heat mounting to fever, and a pulse staggering in its awful haste. He was submissive as long as she was silent, but at a word his thin hand waved in its agonized gesture.

Once he kissed her hands that gave him his drink.

"Poor little thing," he said, "it's so frightened — always was. Never mind — It'll soon be over — only — don't come again" (he had to whisper it), "if you don't mind — till I ring."

She sat listening then for his bell.

Rose came and stayed with her a little while. She wanted to know what the Doctor had said to-day.

"He says he must choose between his genius and his life. And it's I who have to choose. If he goes on he'll kill himself. If I stop him I shall kill him. What am I to do?"

Rose had her own opinion of the dilemma, and no great opinion of the Doctor.

"Do nothin'," she said, and pondered on it. "Look at it sensible. You may depend upon it 'e's found somethin' 'e's got to do. 'E's set 'is 'eart on finishin' it. Don't you cross 'im. I don't believe in crossin' them when they're set."

"And if he dies, Rose? If he dies?"

"'E dies 'is way — not yours."

It was the wisdom of renunciation and repression; but Laura felt that it was right.

Her hour struck and she went up to Owen. He was lying

back now with his eyes closed and his lips parted. Because of its peace his face was like the face of the dead. But his lips were hot under hers and his cheek was fire to her touch. She put her finger on his pulse and he opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"It's finished," he said. "You can take it away now."

She gathered up the loose sheets and laid them in a drawer in his desk. The poem once finished he was indifferent to its disposal. His eyes followed her, they rested on her without noting her movements. They drew her as she came towards him again.

"Forgive me," he said. "It was too strong for me."

"Never again," she murmured. "Promise me, never again till you're well."

"Never again." He smiled as he answered.

Dr. Brodrick, calling late that night, was informed by Laura of the extent to which he had been disobeyed. He thundered at her and threatened, a Brodrick beside himself with fury.

"Do you suppose," she said, "it is n't awful for me to have to stand by and see it, and do nothing? What can I do?"

He looked down at her. The little thing had a will of her own; she was indeed, for her size, preposterously over-charged with will. Never had he seen a small creature so indomitably determined. He put it to her. She had a will; why could n't she use it?

"His will is stronger than mine," she said. "And his genius is stronger than his will."

"You overrate the importance of it. What does it matter if he never writes another line?"

It seemed to her that he charged him with futility, that he echoed — and in this hour! — the voice of the world that tried to make futile everything he did.

"It does n't matter to you," she said. "You never understood his genius; you never cared about it."

"Do you mean to tell me that you — *you* care about it more than you care about him? Upon my word, I don't know what you women are made of."

"What could I do?" she said. "I had to use my own judgment."

"You had not. You had to use mine."

He paused impressively.

"It's no use, my child, fighting against the facts."

To Henry Laura was a little angry child, crying over the bitter dose of life. He had got to make her take it.

He towered over her, a Brodrick, the incarnate spirit of fact.

It was a spirit that revolted her. She stood her ground and defied it in its insufferable tyranny. She thought of how these men, these Brodricks, behaved to genius wherever they met it; how, among them, they had driven poor Jinny all but mad, martyrizing her in the name of fact. As for Owen, she knew what they had thought and said of him, how they judged him by the facts. If it came to that she could fight the Doctor with his own weapons. If he wanted facts he should have them; he should have all the facts.

"*This* isn't what's killing him," she said. "It's all the other things, the things he was made to do. Going out to Manchuria — that began it. He ought never to have been sent there. Then — five years on that abominable paper. Think how he slaved on it. You don't know what it was to him. To have to sit in stuffy theatres and offices, to turn out at night in vile weather; to have to work whether he was fit to work or not."

He looked down at her very quietly and kindly. It was when people were really outrageous that a Brodrick came out in his inexhaustible patience and forbearance.

"You say he had to do all these things. Is that the fact?"

"No," said Laura, passionately, "it's the truth."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean it's what it amounted to. They — they drove him to it with their everlasting criticism and fault-finding and complaining."

"I should not have thought he was a man to be much affected by adverse criticism."

"You don't know," she retorted, "how he was affected. You

can't judge. Anyhow, he stuck to it up to the very last — the very last," she cried.

"My dear Mrs. Prothero, nobody wanted him to ——"

"He did it, though. He did it because he was not what you all thought him."

"We thought him splendid. My brother was saying only the other day he had never seen such pluck."

"Well, then, it's his pluck — his splendour that he's dying of."

"And you hold us, his friends, responsible for that?"

"I don't hold you responsible for anything."

She was trembling on the edge of tears.

"Come, come," he said gently, "you misunderstand. You've been doing too much. You're overstrained."

She smiled. That was so like them. They were sane when they got hold of one stupid fact and flung it at your head. But you were overstrained when you retaliated. When you had made a sober selection from the facts, such a selection as constituted a truth, and presented it to them, you were more overstrained than ever. They couldn't stand the truth.

"I don't hold *you* responsible for his perversity," said the poor Doctor.

"You talked as if you did."

"You misunderstood me," he said sadly. "I only asked you to do what you could."

"I have done what I could."

He ordered her some bromide then, for her nerves.

That evening Prothero was so much better that he declared himself well. The wind had changed to the south. She had prayed for a warm wind; and, as it swept through the great room, she flung off her fur-lined coat and tried to persuade herself that the weather was in Owen's favour.

At midnight the warm wind swelled to a gale. Down at the end of the garden the iron gate cried under the menace and torture of its grip. The sound and the rush of it filled Prothero with exultation. Neither he nor Laura slept.

She had moved her bed close up against his, and they lay side by side. The room was a passage for the wind; it whirled down it like a mad thing, precipitating itself towards the mouth of the night, where the wide north window sucked it. On the floor and the long walls the very darkness moved. The pale yellow disc that the guarded nightlight threw upon the ceiling swayed incessantly at the driving of the wind. The twilight of the white beds trembled.

Outside the gust staggered and drew back; it plunged forward again, with its charge of impetus, and hurled itself against the gate. There was a shriek of torn iron, a crash, and the long sweeping, rending cry of live branches wrenched from their hold, lacerated and crushed, trailing and clinging in their fall.

Owen dragged himself up on his pillows. Laura's arm was round him.

"It's nothing," she said, "only the gate. It was bound to go."

"The gate?"

It seemed to her touch that he drew himself together.

"I said I'd come back — through it ——" he whispered. "I shall — come back" — his voice gathered a sudden, terrible, hoarse vibration — "over it — treading it down."

At that he coughed and turned from her, hiding his face. The handkerchief she took from him was soaked in blood. He shuddered and shrank back, overcome by the inveterate, ungovernable horror.

He lay very still, with closed eyes, afraid lest a movement or a word should bring back the thing he loathed. Laura sat up and watched him.

Towards morning the wind dropped a little and there was some rain. The air was warm with the wet south, and the garden sent up a smell, vivid and sweet, the smell of a young spring day. Once the wind was so quiet that she heard the clock strike in the hall of the hospital. She counted seven strokes.

It grew warmer and warmer out there. Owen was very cold.

Laura ran down-stairs to telephone to the Doctor. She was gone about five minutes.

And Prothero lay in his bed under the window with a pool of blood in the hollow of the sheet where it had jetted, and the warm wind blowing over his dead body.

LXVIII

LAURA PROTHERO was sitting with Jane in the garden at Wendover one day in that spring. It was a day of sudden warmth and stillness that brought back vividly to both of them the hour of Owen's death.

They were touched by the beauty and the peace of this place where Nicky lived his perfect little life. They had just agreed that it was Nicky's life, Nicky's character, that had given to his garden its lucent, exquisite tranquillity. You associated that quality so indivisibly with Nicky that it was as if he flowered there, he came up every spring, flaming purely, in the crocuses on the lawn. Every spring Nicky and a book of poems appeared with the crocuses; the poems as Nicky made them, but Nicky heaven-born, in an immortal innocence and charm.

It was incredible, they said, how heaven sheltered and protected Nicky.

He, with his infallible instinct for the perfect thing, had left them together, alone in the little green chamber on the lawn, shut in by its walls of yew. He was glad that he had this heavenly peace to give them for a moment.

He passed before them now and then, pacing the green paths of the lawn with Nina.

"No, Jinny, I am *not* going on any more," Laura said, returning to the subject of that intimate communion to which they had been left. "You see, it ended as a sort of joke, his and mine — nobody else saw the point of it. Why should I keep it up?"

"Would n't he have liked you to keep it up?"

"He would have liked me to please myself — to be happy. How can I be happy going on — giving myself to the people who rejected *him*? I'm not going to keep *that* up."

"What will you do?"

Laura said that she would have enough to do, editing his poems and his memoirs. Jane had not realized the memoirs. They were, Laura told her, mainly a record of his life as a physician and a surgeon, a record so simple that it only unconsciously revealed the man he was. George Tanqueray had insisted on her publishing this first.

"I hated doing it for some things," she said. "It looks too like a concession to this detestable British public. But I can't rest, Jinny, till we've made him known. They'll see that he didn't shirk, that he could beat the practical men — the men they worship — at their own game, that he did something for the Empire. Then they'll accept the rest. There's an awful irony in it, but I'm convinced that's the way his immortality will come."

"It'll come anyway," said Jane.

"It'll come soonest this way. They'll believe in him tomorrow, because of the things he did with his hands. His hands were wonderful. Ah, Jinny, how could I ever want to write again?"

"What will you *do*, dear child? How will you live?"

"I'll live as he did." She said it fiercely. "I'll live by journalism. It doesn't matter how I live."

"There are so many things," she said, "that don't matter, after all."

Nicky and Nina passed.

"Do you think," said he, "she's happy?"

"Who? Jane? Or Laura?"

"You can't think of Laura," said Nicky, gravely, "without *him*."

"That's it. She is n't without him. She never will be. He has given her his certainty."

"Of immortality?" Nicky's tone was tentative.

"Of the thing he saw. That is immortality. Of course she's happy."

"But I was thinking," Nicky said, "of Jane."

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